

## Saying Goodbye to Ruchama Rivka: A Father's Eulogy – JewishClarity.com

### After a 12-year bout with leukemia, a teenager's parents say goodbye.

For over 12 years, our family struggled with the leukemia of our daughter, Ruchama Rivka, *a"h* (may peace be upon her). On June 29, 2002 (19 *Tammuz*), she passed away at the age of 14. This was my eulogy for her.

The Sages tell us: "Everything that G-d created is for the sake of raising the awareness of G-d and meaning." That's our purpose in life — to understand how this world reflects the Almighty's greatness and to know what life is really all about.

Ruchama Rivka had a very difficult path in life, but she fulfilled her task. She became part of so many different people's lives — hundreds, maybe thousands — most who never actually knew her. She elevated and inspired them to greater G-d-consciousness. The Talmud says that the one who inspires others to do a mitzvah is even greater than the one who does that mitzvah themselves. Think about how much heartfelt prayer was said, how much charity was given, how many acts of kindness, and how much *teshuva* (spiritual improvement) she inspired. Ruchama Rivka accomplished in her 14 years more than many people do in a lifetime.

Ruchama Rivka inspired awareness of G-d largely through her pain and suffering. And she had a lot of suffering. I told her a number of times that she always needed to remember that there was nothing at all which she herself had done which had caused her suffering (which, after all, had begun when she was just two years old!). She was simply a vehicle to bring the awareness of G-d into the world.

Ruchama Rivka was a very, very strong fighter. She dealt with years and years of chemotherapy, intensive radiation, and four separate bone marrow transplants. Yet it was still such a shock when she left us; she had merited so many different miracles until that point, that I was sure there would always be more. After all, there were so many people who cared about her, so many people who were praying for her.

Ruchama Rivka was gentle and sensitive beyond her years; modest as every Jewish girl is meant to be. She loved doing *mitzvot*, and she especially loved doing them properly. Once we went to *Bnei Brak* to ask for a blessing from Rav and Rebbetzin Kanievsky. Rebbetzin Kanievsky suggested that she learn two sections every day on proper speech as well as on trust in G-d. And she did it — every day, for months and months.

Ruchama Rivka was always very excited when it came time for the mitzvah of counting the *omer*. She was determined to make it through to the end of the 49 days without forgetting a single day. This year, she was in the hospital almost the entire period of time. She knew that she would have to spend *Shavuot* in the hospital, and this upset her very much. But when she got to the last day before *Shavuot* and was able to say the blessing on the final day of the *omer* (since she hadn't missed a single day of the counting), her face was shining! She was so happy to have been able to do the mitzvah properly.

She was even careful that none of her five *machzorim* (holiday prayer books), which were all kept in a single case, should ever come to the table. Why? So that there should never be any possibility that *chametz* would get on her *Passover Machzor*. She always had care, precision, and maturity beyond her years. Her greatest pleasure was doing the right thing.

A week ago, Ruchama Rivka went into intensive care. It was the day of our wedding anniversary. She had a terrible infection in her lungs and throat, making it very difficult for her to speak. She

told us how bad she felt that she hadn't been able to have given us an anniversary present. Then she told us how much she loved us, and gave us each what would be her final kiss goodbye.

Ruchama Rivka, just before your *bat mitzvah*, while you were still recovering from your first bone marrow transplant, we spent some time learning together. We learned the thirteen fundamentals of the Rambam. We discussed how the Almighty has no limit to His power, and that He loves us more than we could ever imagine. We talked about how G-d loves you even more than your parents do — and your parents love you very much! We talked about how everything G-d does is for the good, for the greatest good, whether we understand it or whether we don't understand it. And we talked about the fact that, in the end, everything will be clear, and revealed as good.

This lesson might have been very difficult for you to hear and accept at the time. You had already gone through so much at that point. But you did understand it, and you fully accepted it. As the end was approaching this past Friday night, I repeated these messages to you over and over again. While I hope very much that you heard me then, I certainly know that now you can hear me, and I know that now you really understand these ideas.

I want to tell you something remarkable that I learned after your first relapse, when you were eleven years old. It was a very hard time for all of us. You had begun this whole difficult process of treatment at two years old, had gone through chemotherapy for over two years, along with all the checkups afterwards, and finally gotten to a point where we hoped and prayed that we would never ever have to face this leukemia again. And here we were, a few months before your *bat mitzvah*, needing to deal with it once more.

I remember being with you in the hospital on Shabbat, and I was struck by one of the Shabbat prayers: “*sab'einu mituvecha v'samcheinu bishu'asecha* — satisfy us from Your goodness, and make us happy with Your salvation.” I was puzzled by these words. If something is from G-d's own good, then why do we need to ask G-d to “satisfy” us? Wouldn't that happen automatically? And if what occurs to us is truly G-d's salvation, then why do we need to ask G-d to ensure that it will “make us happy”? What are we really asking for in these prayers?

The answer I came to was that when what occurs to us is painful and challenging, these ideas aren't always so obvious or so simple. Even that which is both the ultimate good and salvation from G-d Himself, can sometimes be extremely hard for us to recognize and appreciate. This is what we are asking G-d to help us with.

Then I realized that this is probably why these prayers come right after our request to G-d of “*v'sein chelkeinu b'Torasecha* — grant us a portion in your Torah.” Only once we have that “portion” in Torah can we really feel satisfaction and joy in all that occurs to us in our lives. Ruchama Rivka, I'm sure that this is all very clear to you right now; in this world, we may not always understand how, but absolutely everything is always for the best.

It is traditional to ask the deceased for forgiveness at a funeral. Your mother was superhuman during this whole difficult period, the best mother that any child could possibly have had. She was always there for you. Every single day. Sometimes for months and months in the hospital. She did everything for you. Emotionally, medically, everything! I also tried very hard. I hope that I did everything I could have done, both materially and spiritually. Please forgive us if there was anything which we could have done for you that we didn't.

I want to express gratitude to the many different people who did so much for us. Family, friends and neighbors gave us so much kindness and support that it's hard to imagine that we could have dealt with everything without all of your help. In particular, the volunteers from *Zichron Menachem* helped us in every way imaginable. There was so much self-sacrifice, tremendous care and concern. It really makes one proud to be a member of the Jewish people.

And now, Ruchama Rivka, I want to repeat to you the last blessing that I gave you this past Friday night. I put my hands on your head and said with full focus and concentration: "G-d should bless and protect you, G-d should reveal Himself to you, G-d should grant you final everlasting peace" (*Bamidbar* 6:24-26).

You did not always have shalom (peace) in this world, certainly not like any typical child of age two or fourteen. Now G-d should finally grant you the true shalom you always so deeply wanted. You should be an advocate in heaven to help the entire Jewish people with the huge challenges they face now. During your life, you helped so many people to connect more deeply to reality. You should continue to help and to give us the true shalom which comes only through this clarity.

Ruchama Rivka, we love you and we'll miss you. It's so hard to say goodbye. It was, and will always be, a privilege to be your parents. We will never forget you.

**This should be *l'zechut ul'illuy nishmat* Ruchama Rivka, *a"h*, bat Asher Zevulun**