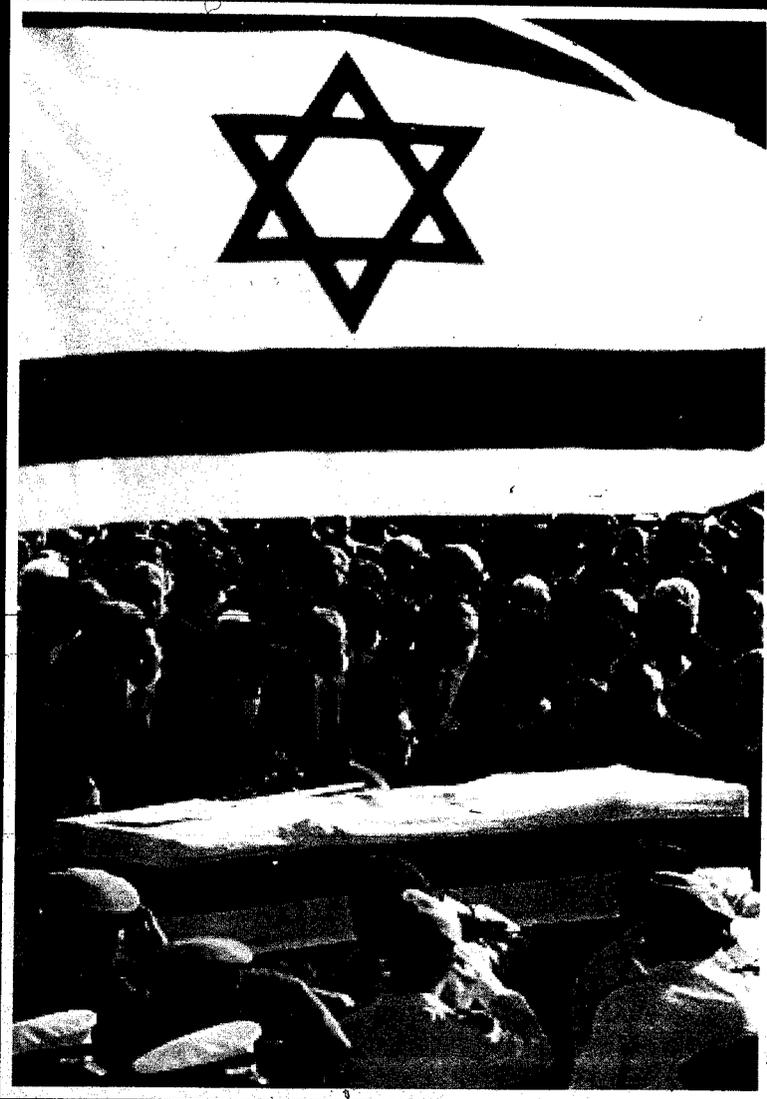


*SPECIAL ISSUE : IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ASSASSINATION*

# HAMEVASER

קול מבשר מבשר ואומר



*"Such arrogance and such invitation to violence and such rhetorical extremism must come to an end -- whether in the Knesset or in party precincts, whether of the Left . . . or the Right, the religious or the secular, whether in Merkaz Harav or in Yeshiva University: Yes, Yeshiva University . . ."*

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

# HAMEVASER

Needless to say, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin z"l has captured the imagination of our community. Whether in the *bet midush*, the cafeteria or the dorm halls, we have passionately debated questions of communal guilt and individual responsibility. Many of the *nishrei veshiva* have deemed it necessary to interrupt their regular *shiurim* in order to examine the various Halakhic and *musari* issues that this assassination has raised for us all. And underlying all of our analysis run the terrifying sensations of both past guilt and future dread regarding *am Yisrael's* ability to settle *Eretz Yisrael* while simultaneously sanctifying God's Forah in the eyes of the world.

It was in order to batter our own consciences that we present this special edition of HAMEVASER. In it we have tried to provide a cross-section of the introspective analysis that have racked both students and Rabbeim.

However, one thing should give us all pause as our community undergoes collective soul searching. The Mishna in Avot tells us that the wise person is one who is "*ro'eh et ha-nolad*," who can predict the future, who sees the roots of events yet to be. The roots of Yigal Amir were first exposed starkly two years ago, when Purim was shockingly interrupted by the news that a religious Jew had massacred Arabs in Hevron. Leaving aside the evil of that deed itself, those murders should have served as a clarion call to alert us to the terrible truth that when twisted within the wraps of ideological extremism, religious Jews could, in fact, kill others; that two thousand years of self-restraint could be tossed aside by hatred and anger. But Baruch Goldstein was swept under the rug, dismissed as an isolated lunatic, and worse, tolerated, even praised in some segments of the Orthodox community. If we had made a strong public outcry against the violence and evil brewing in our midst, and not, as a result of our apathy, violated another Mishna in Avot that asserts that an individual should not be sure of himself even until the day of his death, then we would not have required the blood of Rabin in order to initiate the self-examination process.

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# HAMEVASER

500 West 185th Street, New York, NY 10033

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# MURDERERS, NAZIS, TRAITORS, WISE MEN, AND NOISE

by Rabbi Shalom Carmy



review the effort and shout a little louder.

But screaming at the top of one's lungs will scarcely deter murderers, Nazis and traitors, nor will threat of the ballot box. Is not a more decisive punishment in order? For most big talkers words are primarily a noise that makes for self-importance. The majority of shouters do not become shooters. If anything, the stunned hush that follows the final act of the tragedy is most suitable for a measured amnesia into which the inveigher awakes with no recollection of his actions: he has done nothing; he is responsible for nothing. Yet there is a literal-minded minority that does not care to distinguish the pagantry of hate from the trumpet call of truth. Such individuals draw the line of inference tight. They know one thing: for murderers, Nazis and traitors the only remedy is death...

And so the words became demands, and then became commands. Violent deeds proliferated, while too many of us pretended not to see. Amid the Halakhic hemming and hawing (whether it is indeed permissible to murder someone who disagrees with your politics, or should the *machmir* gallantly refrain) too few of us cried out "Gevalt, enough! *Devar Hashem* is not your political playing!" Therefore we wander in the regret-filled land of the *egla arufa*, as each of us asks if we have the right to say that "our hands have not shed this blood, and our eyes did not see." The greater the influence, the louder the voice, the harder the answer.

Not very long ago, in the days when Prime Minister Rabin z"l regularly demonized American Orthodox *olim*, he was taken to task by an American Orthodox Rabbi. The Rabbi confessed that his colleagues occasionally spoke of Rabin and his government in language intemperate, irresponsible and envenomed. But that was no justification for Rabin to reciprocate in kind. For they were merely rabbis, while he was a world class statesman, who ought to set himself a higher standard.

Good diplomacy can make for flawed *hashkafa*. Mr. Rabin, with all due respect, was a veteran politician. His discourse, and that of his associates, was not always above the campaigner's vernacular of half-truth, bombast and innuendo, the red meat of "us against them" that nourishes the cheers of the adoring crowd. Of *talmidei chachamim*, however, we expect something different. The words of Torah must be spoken with honesty, dignity and humility. The pious Jew must conduct himself in a manner that engenders respect for Torah. If, God forbid, he does the opposite, he desecrates the Name of God.

A significant segment of the Orthodox community liked to express its opposition to the security policy of Mr. Rabin's government by routinely castigating its ministers as murderers, Nazis and traitors. (A trip to the incinerator uncovers the latest issue of a popular tabloid and the predictable headline: "They Were Traitors from the Start.") If we are to believe the crescendo of accusations, Mr. Rabin's malice and/or obtuseness were of such magnitude that his schemes worked inexorably toward "national suicide." He was incessantly depicted as a *rodef* who menaced the lives of Jews, because, due to his abysmal ignorance and arrogance, he came to positions on Israeli security that challenged the certitudes of various journalists and functionaries associated with the Orthodox establishment, the basis for whose certitude was not always obvious to the naked eye. The experts whose authority they invoked did not seem to be more knowledgeable, more experienced, more canny, or more successful than Rabin and his crew, yet their pronouncements were found faultless, while the elected government could only pile error upon error.

What disease of the spirit could begin to explain Rabin's infinite perfidy? It couldn't be his estrangement from Torah *u-mitzvot*, since the politically correct leaders of the Likud were, for the most part, equally removed from observance. There were, in fact, *talmidei chachamim* who disagreed with this assessment of Rabin's policy. But they, too, were branded murderers, reviled, cursed and outshouted. The journalists and teachers and the average *ba'alei bayit* shouted to their hearts' content, and when, having bullied everyone else into silence, they communed with the echoes of their own invective, that was time to

whether in Eilat or in Jerusalem. The only opportunity to present formal charges that respects respect and honor is commensurate with the value of the fore-seeable future. Labor and transportation, education, desecration of God's Name intrude in these days of confusion, skepticism and suspicion. If we are to perpetuate the fresh resistance on the part of others, we must eradicate, pare away the causes of interference on our side, the disdain for what R. Kook called "natural morality" (*moros tiv'v*) that has made healthy moral intuitions an object of distrust and contempt within our camp, the communal self-centeredness that so easily hardens into a callous disregard of the humanity of people who differ or dare to disagree with us; the intellectual timidity and fear of self-examination that render us pitiful to ourselves and blind to others. All these deficiencies are indulgences we cannot afford. Nor can we any longer afford to submit uncritically to the mindless militant trash self-important persons shout. We must learn to say no to moral rubbish, no matter how assured the orator's voice or how impressive the beard.

"The words of the wise are heard in quiet (*be-nachat nishma im*) more than the shouting of him who governs among the fools (Kohelet 9:17)." Much has been said, in the past few days, about the evil of vicious language, and my own remarks have not been kind to adherents of the loud-mouth school of Jewish philosophy. Yet the *parak* is more than disapproval of the bellowing bully and his audience of dunces; it is also a praise of the wise. Note carefully, the words of the wise are not only spoken in quiet, they are heard in quiet. It is possible to speak quietly, to modulate one's voice, at least for a time, by a simple application of will. To hear in quiet requires a more radical reordering of one's attention: it is less the product of sheer will power than the fruit of a sustained process of education.

The shouter rules not only because he intimidates the competition, but also because his listeners have learned to take comfort in the meaningless noise and overheated rhetoric, in all that helps us to gaze at the mirror enchanted by the view, or look at our reflection and see nothing. The quiet listener has summoned up the courage to defy the shouter, but he has also discovered the power to overcome the attraction of the shouter's message.

Onkelos, in translating the phrase *nefesh chayya as ru'ach memallela*, points to the central place of language in determining man's purpose in the world. It is the power to think, to reflect, to criticize oneself and one's society, to understand oneself, to speak to others and to listen. The blustering bully, with his cult of amnesia and irresponsibility, contaminates the value of words. He erodes his own standing as a unique person, created in the image of his Maker, long before he succeeds in dehumanizing the target of his thoughtlessness. If philosophy has been described as an activity that condemns us to mean what we say, then many of our functionaries, teachers and other communal ornaments, have strenuously avoided it. It is our place, as *benei Torah* who are privileged to have at our disposal the most sophisticated tools of self-examination, to remind them, and ourselves, that words have meaning not only in the liberal arts, but in real life as well.

May God, who consoles the bereaved and forgives the penitent, grant us the power and the integrity to extract light from our present darkness. May all the house of Jacob dwell together in fraternity and true peace, to do the will of *Avinu she-ba-shamayim*, in whose light we walk.

Rabbi Shalom Carmy is professor of Bible and Philosophy at Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women.

Repentance weaves together the past and the future, disease tutoring cure, therapy redeeming diagnosis. Though we still tremble with the initial horror and shame of the tragedy, it is perhaps not too early to reflect on the noble and exciting dimension of *teshuvah* devoted to the resolve for the future. Let me adumbrate two themes among the many that have crossed my mind this week.

Regarding our duties as representatives of Torah,

### III

# HAMEVASER

## ON THE ASSASSINATION OF PRIME MINISTER RABIN Z"l

by Rabbi Yehuda Amital

based on a sicha delivered in Yeshivat Har Etzion

summarized by Ronnie Zigler

When Avner ben Netzer was murdered by Yoav (Shemuel II 3:33), David ha-Melekh intoned, "Should Avner have died the death of a churl? Your hands were not bound, your feet were not put in fetters; but you fell as one falls before treacherous men... You will know that a prince, and a great man has fallen this day in Israel." We today are stunned and shattered, depressed, disgraced and shamed, pained and sorrowed, by the abominable murder of the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, in this, *reshit tzemichat ge'ulatenu*, the dawn of our redemption.

Ramban, commenting on the commandment to appoint a king, states that whomever the Jewish people choose is the choice of God. If God had not approved, the election would not have succeeded. This horrible act, directed against the kingdom of Israel, is also an assault on the kingdom of God. It is an assault on the entire people of Israel, not only because of the act itself, but because one man cannot say, I will decide for everyone, I have the right to assault the anointed of God, chosen by the people, a man who dedicated his entire life to the Jewish people. How many merits he had! I even if one disagreed with all his policies, the role the Prime Minister played in the Six Day War alone is sufficient to atone for anything else he might have done. Our sages tell us even a sinful idolater cannot be put to death unless the highest judicial authorities condemn him — and now, along comes an individual who decides that he is the Sanhedrin.

Aside from this, we are obligated to rend our garments over the desecration of God's name. Have we become like Sodom, do we resemble Gomorrah? The Jewish people, who taught the world absolute morality, beginning with the prohibition on murder; the Jewish state, the only democracy in the Middle East, a nation founded on the vision of redemption — now resembles some Third World banana republic. This obligates us in *keri'a* (tearing), if not in rending our clothes, then in rending our hearts. What has happened to us?

Rav Menachem Zamba zt"l, commenting on the argument in Agudath Israel sixty years ago concerning the partition plan, stated that the continued suffering of the Jews in the world constitutes a desecration of God's name. The State of Israel, the refuge of all Jews, represents the sanctification of God's name after the Holocaust. And now I tremble — for God does not forgive the desecration of His name. There is a double *chillul Hashem*, when one who claims to be a *ben Torah*, who sees himself as serving God, is capable of this deed. This is Torah? This is Torah education? What a terrible *chillul Hashem*! Anyone who is not shocked lacks even a iota of *yir'at shamayyim*; he has no idea of what is the honor of God.

On the national level, I do not know who is responsible, the Right or the Left, for using more inflammatory language. But on our level, in the *bet midrash*, measuring with a Torah standard, I know. When a man is found dead in the field, the Torah requires the elders of the neighboring city to state: Our hands have not spilled the blood (Devarim 21:1-9). The sages explain that their declaration of innocence means that they did not send off the victim without provisions and without escort. Rashi elaborates: perhaps he left the town without food, and, out of hunger and desperation, attacked another man and was killed. This possibility, far-fetched as it seems, will preclude the elders from declaring their innocence if they did not provide him with food when he left.

This is the Torah measure of culpability! Those who spoke of the "*memshelet zadon*," who called the government a "Judenrat," who questioned the legitimacy of the

government, who publicly issued the ruling concerning disobeying orders in the army — are they less culpable than the elders who failed to provide a traveler with provisions? Is the connection more far-fetched? Can they truly say "Our hands have not spilled this blood?"

And as for the title "traitor" which they constantly shouted at Rabin — why did they think he was a traitor? For money? To save himself? Or because he had a different opinion, because, looking ten years ahead, he feared for the future? Is there here less responsibility for what happened than in the case mentioned in the *gemara*? After the Goldstein massacre, how many rabbis condemned it outright, without hemming and hawing? Do not you see the connection between that and the current tragic events? The *midrash* tells us: "You shall love the Lord your God" — be loved by others, distance yourself from sin and from theft, even from an idolater, for one who steals from an idolater will eventually steal from a Jew, and one who lies to an idolater will eventually lie to a Jew, and one who sheds the blood of an idolater will eventually shed the blood of a Jew; for the Torah was given only to sanctify His great name in the nations."

On an educational level, I think this tragic event also reveals something frightening. A law student, an educated person, thought that by killing Rabin he would solve all of Israel's problems! What primitiveness, what shallowness, what a lack of thought! In our school and youth movements, have we educated so shallow a generation, where slogans have replaced critical thought? Where do people get the idea that they have to ask a rabbi about whether to say "*ve-ten tal u-matar*," but regarding issues which affect all of Israel, they can decide for themselves? And the small rabbis who speak of the need to use force — would they dare to issue rulings about the laws of Shabbat or *aguna*? I am gravely worried by this entire ideology of force. And I am even more worried about the dangers posed by people who believe in "sinning for the sake of Heaven." *Reb Yerucham*, the *mushgi'ach* of *Mir*, said that the verse "...pen yifteh levavkhem, ve-saritem va-avadtem elohim acherim" teaches us that the evil impulse can persuade us that even idolatry is permissible — and even more so, it is a *mitzvah*! And so too with murder, adultery, and all other sins. We are not inoculated against this danger, which lurks especially in the ideology of force, and is doubly dangerous when people begin to speak in the name of God.

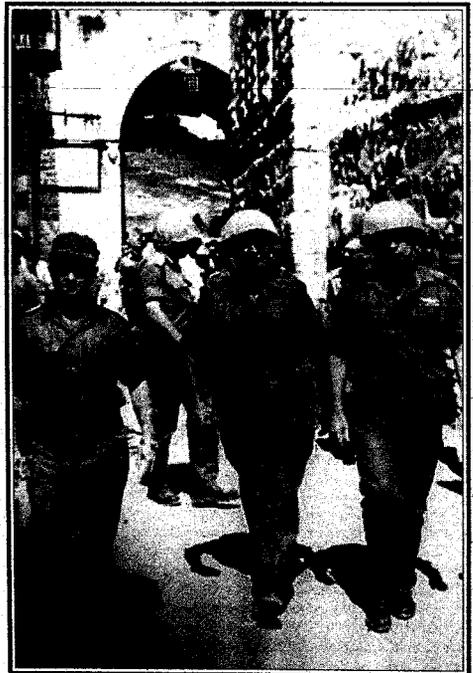
With respect to the future, I have a feeling that extremism on both sides will lessen. We can continue, even while disagreeing, to find the will and the strength to build the State of Israel, for this is the will of God. Despite our differences of opinion, we still have much to unite us. I believe that God will continue to guide us from afar, with all the mistakes we are likely to commit. Remember the statement of Rav Herzog zt"l, that we are assured that the Third Jewish Commonwealth will not fall.

We must fight against hatred. After the murder, we hear many people quoting Rav Kook zt"l, who said that just as the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sin'at chinmam*, so will the Third

Temple be built because of *ahavat chinmam*. But why call it *ahavat chinmam*? Are there not many others, yes even among the non-religious, who deserve our love? There are many dedicated members of our society: members of the security services who vigilantly protect us, boys who give three years to the army, doctors who work for meager wages rather than seek their fortunes overseas, and many others. If someone does not share our religious commitment, it does not mean he has no values, and it does not mean that he has no just claim to our love.

The real battle is over the Jewishness of the State. That is where we must concentrate. Abba Kovner, the poet and socialist leader, once proposed to me to join him in spreading some Yiddishkeit among Israeli youth — I would contribute the Torah, he the literature. One year before his death, he said to me, "We have lost a generation; as far as Judaism is concerned, they will not listen even to me anymore. They associate Judaism only with militancy." In the battle for the Jewish soul of the nation, we have received a stab in the back. Now we have to prove that "*derakkeha darkhei no'am*." We must constantly remember that every action, every appearance, can be a *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of God's name). "We will increase unity and avoid hatred; we will find the ways to see the positive aspects of every Jew; we will pray to God that he will protect us and purify our hearts from hatred, envy, and slander; and we will continue to build this great undertaking which is the work of the hands of God — the return to Zion — until we witness the coming of the redeemer, speedily in our days, Amen."

Rabbi Yehuda Amital is Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion and founder of Meimad.



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# ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY

by Rabbi Yosef Blau



It is difficult to react rationally to the murder of the Israeli Prime Minister by a Jew, and what is even more inconceivable, by a religious Jew. No event occurs in a vacuum; a climate is created by the actions of many. There are extremists on both sides; there are secular Jews who have no understanding of our religious values and some who hate us and will use this act to discredit all religious Jews as fanatics. Unfortunately, I have no forum to communicate with the moderate elements in that community. I will try to explore some factors that I am afraid have unintentionally helped create a climate in which extremism on our side has emerged with terrifying results.

The fact that the assassin is an Orthodox Jew who attended a Hesder Yeshiva together with many of our students, and who worked for Russian Jews in Riga with others, has added to the shock of the tragedy. Those who knew him remembered a fine Yeshiva student who appeared perfectly normal. To dismiss his act as that of a madman with no greater implications is not plausible.

While I can not claim any personal knowledge of what caused his actions, his own justifications are restatements of positions expressed by both prominent rabbis and political leaders from within our community. The *din ve-cheshbon* we failed to make after Baruch Goldstein's killing twenty-nine Arabs in Chevron should not be avoided

again. Did our excessive rhetoric play a role? How could anyone be so certain of the absolute correctness of his position that killing became acceptable?

In recent years there has been a remarkable growth and deepening of religious commitment within our youth. The years spent learning in Israel are a critical component in this development. We powerfully identify with the settlers who with self-sacrifice and zeal are expanding Jewish Israel. The messianic fervor of some is often shared, if not openly articulated. In America, including time spent studying at YU, we constantly balance living in two worlds, while the Israeli Yeshiva is purely a place to study Torah. The same fellow who plans on going to medical or law school in America and on working with gentiles and non-observant Jews does not have a single conversation with a secular Jew while in Israel and the only Arabs he hears about are Arabs terrorists.

Perhaps the single most important influence on the student's religious value system takes place in a black-and-white environment with no need to interact with those who do not share common values. The entire Yeshiva is often sent to anti-government demonstrations and Shabbatonim are held in Kiryat Arba. Clearly, opposing the government peace plans becomes a religious obligation, not merely a political position. Added to this is a tinge of messianism connected directly to settling the full territory of the land of Israel. A government led by secularists who are not sensitive to the religious significance of the land becomes the enemy.

Not long ago the debate whether it was permissible Halakhically to return land for peace was a theoretical question. The weight of rabbinic opinion, including that of the Rav, was that it was permitted, though those who opposed certainly deserved to be taken seriously. In certain circles, the fact that great *poskim* permitted returning land has been forgotten. In a climate of confrontation, those with extreme uncompromising views gain prominence.

Throughout Israel's history, at least one religious party was part of the coalition government — until now. Though the governments were not Halakhic, the religious

community did not feel excluded. Presently a serious dialogue began to develop. When in opposition and with no immediate hope of changing the situation through the election process, I tried to lead an attempt through democratic consultation to create a coalition which could bring the government. Civil disobedience never remained an alternative world of "if" and "then." The citizens who support our position become part of us. This legitimizes extremism and makes them think they are representatives of the broad cause.

The certitude, the extreme rhetoric, the speech of supporters of the peace plan as traitors, is foreign to the nature of our discourse and has not yet been adequately explained. I suspect that a thwarted messianism is the key. Religious Zionism always had a messianic component and the Six Day War brought it to the fore: "If keeping and settling the land will bring *mashiach*, then returning land to Arab control is much more than a no-take, it is preventing the redemption. Israel's whole religious significance is at stake and no compromise is possible. It becomes a fight between good and evil and there is no place for restraints. Gush Etzionim has open Messianic tendencies but I have heard rabbis speak in apocalyptic Messianic terms in America as well. Killing a traitor in order to bring *mashiach* can be understood.

One who is not a prophet can never be sure that he is properly understanding the divine message. Yet the need for reflection in our camp seems clear. Let us acknowledge the possibility the we may be wrong. Religious leadership should focus on mending the fabric of the Jewish people. It is hard for me to believe that any action of the Israeli government will seriously affect the timing of the coming of *mashiach*. Rambam rules that our arding the Jewish people to do *teshiva* will, and it is always best to start with ourselves.

Rabbi Yosef Blau is Mashgiach Ruchani of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and Mazer Yeshiva Program.

## Lamm, continued from page 12

all kinds: When I argue against uncivil speech, it is not a matter of taste or a preference for bourgeois manners. *Le style c'est l'homme*: Style often reveals character. We have allowed ourselves too often the luxury of intemperate, extremist expression, and we must all band together to learn how to avoid it — whether by young or old. We must no longer be as tolerant as we have been of strident invective and ugly epithets and hurtful hype. Neither the Right nor the Left have been careful enough in gauging the temperature of debate. All of us must rethink not our positions as much as our methods. And we must develop a new respect for simple civility.

At the creation of man, the Torah tells that the Almighty exclaimed, "*ve-hinei tov me'od*" — "Behold, it is very good." The Midrash offers a startling commentary on this verse: "*ve-hinei tov me'od — zeh hamavet*" — "very good" refers to...death! The great Rabbi Yosef Engel of pre-War Galicia explains tersely: *kol me'odi'ut zeh mavet* — all "very-ness," all extremism — even "very" good — is deadly!

I return to the object of our grief, to Yitzhak Rabin. He was not, it is true, an observant Jew, a *shomer mitzvot*. Perhaps if we had his upbringing, we would be no different — and if he had ours, he might easily have outshined us... But he was a great man — whether or not you agreed with him — and his place in Jewish history is assured.

The famous Kabbalist R. Chayyim Vital teaches that there are within humans two different levels of soul — one is *nefesh* and the other is *ru'ach* — and that one may possess one or both or neither. If one is helpful to his fellow humans and devoted to people and his land, if

he is motivated by genuine moral considerations, he possesses a higher degree of *nefesh* than one who spends his life in Torah and *mitzvot* but fails to serve his fellow Jews and his country; whereas the latter possess *ru'ach* which the former does not.

I am in no position to judge the quality of Yitzhak Rabin's *ru'ach*. But I can tell you this: he had an noble *nefesh*. His entire life was spent on behalf of his people and his country. His *nefesh* was one of indomitable courage, of bravery in war and in peace, of genuine heroism on the battlefield and in the chancelleries of the world. He laid down his life on the *mizbe'ach* of *shalom*, the altar of peace. And *shalom* is a name of the Creator — not a political policy convenient for the agendas of the Left or one

fought for Jerusalem in the War of Independence, who as Chief of Staff of the armed forces of Israel in 1967 liberated Jerusalem, who served his country gallantly as Ambassador, as Minister of Labor and of Defense and twice as Prime Minister and who, above all, was a man of great *nefesh*, of a courage that will inspire generations to come of our people.

*Tehei nafsho ve-rucho u-nishmato tzurivot bitzror ha-chayyim.*

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm is President of Yeshiva University and Rosh HaYeshiva and Nasi of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary.

that the Right implies we must look upon with suspicion...

In Iran there was yesterday and is today celebration. In Lebanon there is dancing. In Gaza there is joyous shooting in the air. On the lips of some incredibly foolish Jews there forms a smirk of shameful satisfaction. But for us, for the majority of sane Jews all over the world, and in the hearts of good men and women of all peoples, there is profound sadness — an *evel kavod me'od*, for we have lost the general who

# Ketubot

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# HAMEVASER

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## "AND YITZCHAK TREMBLED A GREAT TREMBLING"



by  
Rabbi  
Mayer  
Twersky

"*Ua vechenud Yitzchak charada gedola ud me-od.*"  
"And Yitzchak trembled a great trembling," Rashi, quoting Chazal, explains that he shuddered because he saw *Gehinom* open beneath him. I, too, shuddered when I first heard of the Rabin assassination. And for the same reason I sensed *Gehinom* opening. When a Jew savagely murders a fellow Jew, *Gehinom* opens, and we are convulsed by an uncontrollable tremor: A *chillul Hashem* of the highest magnitude has transpired.

As the identity and biographical highlights of the assassin became known, the unspeakably horrifying *chillul Hashem* grew greater and greater. The murder was perpetrated by an otherwise exemplary *ben Torah* and in the name of Torah. To be sure, cries of condemnation were heard, but the condemnation was not universal. Rabin's death, at the hands of a fellow Jew, was publicly and ghoulishly celebrated by some and smugly condoned by others. The fires of *chillul Hashem* rage uncontrollably. And it is abundantly clear that the Rabin assassination reflects the tone and temper of our times and our Torah society. The pain is deep and searing, but the truth is unavoidable. We must confront this terrible truth and issue a collective "*aval ashamim anachnu.*" We must — both individually and collectively — introspect as never before, identify and diagnose the fatal flaws, and enact profound corrective measures.

The vital, seminal issues that lie at the heart of the raging destructive debate are, at once, both Halakhic and political. Is it permissible to surrender land in *Eretz Yisrael* to save lives and secure peace? There is no Halakhic consensus on this crucial issue. The foremost twentieth century expositor and authority on Halakha, Rav Soloveitchik *zt"l*, opined that Halakha permits (and, therefore, presumably mandates) surrendering land to secure peace. Rav Ovadia Yosef, the pre-eminent contemporary *Sefardi posek*, concurs. To be sure, Halakhists of stature demur and prohibit relinquishing any territories. Moreover, according to the first school of thought, the military and political situation must be expertly assessed: will relinquishing territories, in fact, induce peace? Here too no consensus exists. Debate and disputation preponderate.

Chazal compare Torah scholars to warriors. But what are the rules of engagement for Talmudic warfare? What is appropriate? What inappropriate? How ought the Halakhic disputants to view and relate to each other? What standing do the views of one's Halakhic opponent have? The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot cites the disputes between Shamay and Hillel as paradigms of a *machloket le-shem shamayyim*, a dispute for the sake of heaven. The Talmud in *Masechet Yevamot* elaborates further: "...they treated each other with love and friendship, in fulfillment of the verse, 'You shall love [both] truth and peace.'"

Neither Bet Shammay nor Bet Hillel advocated their respective Halakhic positions tentatively; they did not waiver or vacillate out of self-doubt. Each school had listened attentively to the counter-arguments, and had definitely rejected them. Each school spoke with conviction and relative certitude. But their passionate love of truth in no way interfered with their equally passionate love of peace. In *Masechet Eravin* the Talmud records the *bat kol* that, speaking of the myriad disputes between Bet Shammay and Bet Hillel, proclaimed, "*elu ve-elu divrei elokim chayyim*" — "these are and those are the words of the living God." Each opinion is legitimate; each position is valid. Accordingly, no Halakhic disputant has a right to deny or invalidate the legitimate opinion of his Halakhic opponent, no matter how vital the issue, no matter his own degree of conviction and relative certitude. Nor can any contemporary Halakhist claim the normative endorsement of a *bat kol*. If an Halakhist has the credentials of *yir at shamayyim* and Torah scholarship, his opinion may never be denied, dismissed or de-legitimized.

We can find many contemporary examples of this type of tolerance — in both the Halakhic and Hashkafic arenas. Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l*, the pre-eminent *posek* in America, was asked about the Halakhic feasibility of constructing an *eruv* in Manhattan. The question was submitted to him time and time again, and each time he steadfastly ruled that it was Halakhically untenable. Then a variant of the original question was submitted: are those Halakhic authorities who disagree with your ruling per-

mitted to rule differently and sanction an *eruv* around Manhattan? Since Rav Feinstein had argued his position clearly and forcefully, one would have anticipated a negative ruling. But the *responsium* that saintly *gaon* penned stated that any qualified Halakhist who felt that an *eruv* was Halakhically feasible may rule and act accordingly. His differing opinion is equally legitimate and valid. Rav Feinstein's relative certitude and conviction regarding his own position notwithstanding.

On a visit to *Eretz Yisrael* several years ago, I had the privilege of spending some time with Rav Meir Schlesinger, the now-retired (but then active) *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Sha'alvum. He told me that when he needed guidance, he consulted his illustrious *Rebbe*, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l*. He would present the issue at hand and outline his proposed course of action. Occasionally, Rav Auerbach disagreed, discouraged him from that course of action, and advocated an alternative. At times, Rav Auerbach simply concurred. But most often he would reply, "I see things differently. But if this is how *you* see things, you should be guided by your vision."

The first annual Chinuch Aitzmai dinner, held on January 11, 1956, honored Rav Aharon Kotler *zt"l*. The Rav, according to Rav Kotler's personal request, served as honorary chairman and delivered the keynote address. The Rav's immortal words resonate powerfully [translated from the Yiddish]:

"I am most proud this evening. First, because many active members of Mizrahi are present. It is a sign it can rise above narrow political thinking. I am proud to see members and leaders of the Histadrut Horabbonim; I am also proud that sitting at the dais, I see my own *ba'alei battim* from the Moriah *shul*, and I would like you to know that I never flatter my *ba'alei battim*. But despite the fact that seventy-five to eighty percent of this *shul* is officially bound to Mizrahi ideology, their presence here this evening is testimony that Jews can rise above all political ideologies and extend a hand when it comes to Torah. And I am especially proud that I myself came — though I strongly feared that the *yetzer hora* would subvert my intentions."

Rav Soloveitchik was not one to indulge in self-approbation. Nevertheless, he did so on this one occasion to teach us a crucial lesson: above all, one must take pride in tolerating legitimate disagreement and transcending politics in order to unite under the banner of Torah.

Rav Soloveitchik proceeded to laud Rav Kotler as the *gadol ha-dor*. He added that when he looked upon Rav Kotler, he was reminded of his paternal grandfather, Rav Chayyim Brisker. No greater compliment existed in the Rav's lexicon. But Rav Aharon was very outspoken in his criticism of Yeshiva University and firmly allied with the Agudas Yisroel movement. Still, the Rav recognized and respected his legitimate opinions, and paid homage to him. "They treated each other with love and friendship..." Alas for those who have departed, and are no longer present!

The arrogant sense of omniscience and absolute certitude that have plagued the debate concerning the peace process are antithetical to Torah. Neither Rav Feinstein nor Rav Auerbach nor Rav Soloveitchik ever taught us to deny and de-legitimize the views of Halakhic opponents. Prime Minister Rabin's actions in advancing the peace process were (and remain) Halakhically justifiable. Not Halakhically indisputable, but certainly Halakhically justifiable. No one amongst us — be on the left, right, or center, in *Eretz Yisrael* or in *chutz la-aretz*, a minister in the government or a settler in *Yehuda ve-Shomron* — may arrogantly presume the absolute certitude that is the exclusive domain of He who is omniscient, and deny the legitimacy of our opponents' opinions.

No one amongst us, regardless of his location on the political or religious or ideological spectrum, should point a finger of blame at others. *Keshot atzmekha techila* — first, perfect yourself! Each of us ought to be so pre-occupied with self-indictment that we simply cannot find the time to indict others. Those of us who stand on the political Left should question, "how could we tolerate the incessant verbal attacks on the settlers? How could we allow them to be equated with Hamas or Khomeini? How much poison was released into the political environment by police brutality at anti-government demonstrations?" Those

of us on the Right should query, "How could we brand the Prime Minister of Israel a Nazi? Could we call him a traitor simply because his vision for the security of the State of Israel differed from ours? His policies were Halakhically valid - how could we remain silent when extremists pronounced him a *rodef*? And if our ambivalence about the peace process places us in the political center: how could we not intervene and condemn the inflammatory, intolerable invective from both ends of the political spectrum? Claims of passivity are not a defense; the prohibition of "lo ta'amed al dam ve'ekha" precludes such injurious inaction.

Let us be quite explicit. The fatal flaw of intolerance and de-legitimation pervades our community. In *Eretz Yisrael* the peace process provided an issue that is so vital and emotionally charged that the flaw of intolerance manifested itself in the form of murder. Here in America we are afflicted with the same contemptuous intolerance; we merely lack an equally provocative issue.

But there are other fatal flaws that were manifest in the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin. The Almighty implanted within us a powerful instinct that inhibits us from committing murder. As a result, under normal circumstances no Jew, or for that matter any civilized person, is capable of committing cold-blooded murder. One of two extreme conditions must be satisfied before this instinct can be overcome. The first possible condition is that the perpetrator is so evil and has corrupted himself so thoroughly that the voice of his conscience is inaudible, buried beneath multiple layers of evil. The perpetrator is himself a monster, his *tzalem Elokim* virtually unrecognizable. But this condition was not satisfied in the Rabin assassination; Yigal Amir is not a monster. There is, however, a second possible condition: if we perceive the *victim* as a monster. In such a case, the voice of our divinely bestowed conscience is silenced, and we become capable of cold-blooded murder, even in the name of Torah.

Yitzhak Rabin was dehumanized and demonized by his political opponents. His murder became possible. It became inevitable.

But why was he so dehumanized and demonized? Partially because of the arrogant omniscience that de-legitimized his personal opinions and political beliefs. There were other contributing factors, as well. He was scorned and hated (I use the term advisedly) because he was a secular Jew who headed an anti-religious government.

In such a situation, what attitude and approach does the Torah prescribe? Certainly, we do not speak of legitimate disagreement here. We speak not with relative certitude, but absolute certitude. The nightclubs and mixed beaches of Tel Aviv do not constitute a legitimate alternate lifestyle, and *chillul Shabbat* is not a legitimate alternative to *shemirat Shabbat*. And so the question beckons, how do observant Jews relate to their secular brethren?

The *Chazon Ish* formulated the answer boldly and authoritatively. In his discussion of *moridin ve-en ma'alain* (the Halakha that certain grievous sinners are to be thrown into deep pits, and left there to their certain fate), the *Chazon Ish* penned the following: "it would appear that this Halakha is only operative when Divine providence is clearly evident as it was when miracles were commonplace and the *bat kol* was functional, and the righteous individuals of the generations were under special Divine providence discernable to all. In those times heretics perversely provoked themselves to the pursuit of pleasure and anarchy, and in those times excising evil people constituted protection of the world because all knew that inciting the people of the generation would bring calamity to the world; it would bring pestilence and war and famine. But now in an era during which God's providence is concealed, and the masses are bereft of faith, orchestrating the death of sinners does not repair the breach in the wall of religion, but enlarges it because the masses will view such actions as *destructive* and *violent*, God forbid, and since our sole purpose is to be constructive, this Halakha [of *moridin*] is not operative at a time when it does not yield constructive results, and it is incumbent upon us to attract the masses to Torah through love and to position them so that they can experience the radiance of Torah, to the best of our ability." How profoundly insightful, how eerily prophetic! The prescription of the *Chazon Ish* did not allow for dehu-

manizing or demonizing Prime Minister Rabin. If we had only heeded the wise Torah counsel of the *Chazon Ish* our hands would not be stained with Yitzhak Rabin's blood.

Moreover, the Torah provides very precise counsel as to how we should relate to a secular head of state, even an anti-religious one. In *Sefer Shemot*, God charges Moshe and Aharon with the mission of speaking to Par'o. Rash, *ad locum*, quotes *Chazal*, "He [God] commanded them [Moshe and Aharon] to accord Par'o respect." How stunning! Who was Par'o that his dignity had to be maintained? Rambam writes that in extreme, extraordinary cases a person may sin so grievously and commit such unspeakable treachery and become so evil that, in response, God decrees that he forfeit his free will and be denied any further opportunity to repent, thus ensuring his punishment and ultimate destruction. Tanakh (encompassing better than half of the history of the world) records very few instances of such incredible evil. And who is the first and foremost example? Par'o! And yet it is God's will that Moshe and Aharon address Par'o respectfully because he is a head of state. In a courageous article penned and published some forty years ago, Rav Henkin, chastised those who spoke derisively and contemptuously to and of the then heads of state. Think what you may, say what you wish, David Ben-Gurion, Levi Eshkol, and Golda Meir were not worse than Par'o. They too must be accorded respect and addressed respectfully. So, with considerable understatement, said Rav Henkin. And so too must we say regarding Yitzhak Rabin and his successor Shimon Peres. No matter how vehemently we oppose their political policies and personal religious orientations, the Torah decrees that, as heads of state, they be accorded respect. The Torah does not allow us to brand them 'Nazis' or 'traitors.'

Had we embraced Yitzhak Rabin lovingly and accorded him the respect due a head state, he could never have been demonized and dehumanized. Had these processes been prevented, our hands would not be stained with the blood of Yitzhak Rabin.

Let them be no misunderstanding: no one was obligated to abandon his principles or political convictions. And no one was allowed to abdicate his responsibility to advocate what seemed best for the people of Israel. But the passionate pursuit of *emet* should have been coupled with the equally passionate pursuit of civility and love. Instead we felt and acted out of *sin'a*.

Perhaps you will ask: how do I know that *sin'a* was a driving force? The answer is simple: for a brief moment, view the Rabin assassination with tunnel vision. Cast aside Halakhic, moral and religious considerations. Reflect upon this watershed event from a purely political perspective. Even from that drastically limited perspective, that assassination was the height of political recklessness and foolishness. As even the most casual observer of modern history (to say nothing of the astute student of political history) knows, nothing energizes and re-vitalizes a cause as martyrdom does. Case in point: when the Marcos government in the Philippines assassinated Benito Aquino on his return from exile, its fate was sealed. The revolutionary cause was so energized that its momentum became unstoppable and irresistible. (Perhaps the downfall of the government was already inevitable, but it was certainly accelerated by Aquino's martyrdom.) The renewed momentum of the peace process in the wake of the Rabin assassination could easily have been predicted. Now, it has become virtually impossible to legitimately oppose the peace process without appearing to condone murder.

Moreover, Yitzhak Rabin was not a charismatic leader whose stirring Churchill-like oratory was sweeping the country into frenzied support for his idiosyncratic policies. He was not indispensable to the advancement of the peace process. Whether a statistical majority or minority, it is undeniable that large segments of the population support the peace process. There was no reason to imagine that Rabin's assassination would impede the peace process. Quite the contrary. And precisely because this was so abundantly clear, the question beckons, why was Rabin assassinated?

For the answer, we need not look any further than Rashi's commentary on the Torah. Bil'am, as he embarks on his journey to curse *Benei Yisrael*, saddles his own donkey. He deviates from the norm and does not relegate this

mental task to his servants (of attendant): *mal'am be'ama mekalkalet et ha shora* - from this we derive that hatred overrules norm and convention and know no bound.

The Rabin assassination, politically reckless, brutal and counterproductive, is a perfect example. The hatred was bred of arrogant omniscience and contemptuous rejection of his secular outlook. And now we know that hatred knows no bounds whatsoever.

*Chazal* teach that "each *shogeg* or each *mevul* he *chillul Hashem*" - in relation to the profaning of God's name, no distinction is drawn between willful and unintentional violation. This is highly unusual in virtually all cases, an unintentional violation is considered less severe. And the few exceptions to this rule seem to be instances wherein the willful violation is dealt with equally leniently, while in the instance of *chillul Hashem* the clear implication is that the unintentional violation is dealt with equally harshly. Why is this so?

This week one level of meaning of the Mishnah became painfully clear to me. If a Jewish brute murders a fellow Jew, undoubtedly a colossal *chillul Hashem* has occurred. How could a Jew become so corrupted? *God's name* has been profaned. But, at least, it is self-evident that this murderous Jew has betrayed Torah and his actions were antithetical to Torah. But when a *ben Torah* murders a fellow Jew *be-shogeg*, convinced that he is executing the will of God, how much greater the *chillul Hashem* is! Measured subjectively, it is less severe. But measured objectively, it is more severe. In the latter case, Torah is not merely betrayed, but perverted and distorted beyond recognition.

*Parshat Vayera* presents us with an enigma. The behavior of Lot seemingly defies understanding. On the one hand, he risks life and limb to extend hospitality to two strangers. Such self-sacrifice, such virtue! And yet when his house is encircled by the evil-scheming citizens of Sodom, Lot volunteers to sacrifice his own daughters. He is ready to allow them to be violated and possibly killed "Do not harm them [my daughters] as you see fit, but do not hurt these men [the wayfarers]." Such unspeakable betrayal, such debauchery! And in the name of morality!

Indeed it seemingly defies explanation. And yet we are all too familiar with this phenomenon. We know of animal rights advocates who will recklessly bomb scientific laboratories risking human life! Self-described compassionate doctors who regularly abort unborn children out of empathy for the mother! Are these not instances of "Lot morality?" Surely, they are.

We see that misplaced or misinterpreted morality or Torah is very dangerous. Lot, as a member of Avraham Avinu's household, learned that *gedola hakhusat orkham mi-kabalat penet ha-shekhina*. He did not understand the context of the Halakha. He did not begin to fathom when, where, and how this Halakha was to be implemented. He took a phrase of Torah, and divorced it from the totality of Torah. As a result, the Torah value became so prevented and distorted so as to become unrecognizable. In place of Torah morality, a new creed arose, *Lot morality*. Similarly, one hears of the Halakha of *rodef*. One learns that it is a mitzvah to kill a *rodef*. But one is woefully ignorant of the true definition of the term *rodef*, and dangerously deficient in knowing where, when, and how it is to be implemented. The Halakha becomes perverted and distorted beyond recognition. It is no longer a part of Torah morality; it has been transformed into *Lot morality*.

*Lot morality* is uniquely and exceedingly dangerous. Distorted Torah morality is far more dangerous than secular morality because it presumes to have a Divine mandate.

Yitzhak Rabin was a victim of *Lot morality*! What is the Halakhic imperative at this most depressing moment in history? No one can simply maintain his routine. No matter how crowded our schedules, no matter how precious our time, all of us must condemn the *chillul Hashem* that has been and continues to be perpetrated. We must broadcast to the world in every available forum that we, as Torah-observant and dedicated Jews, deplore and

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# HAMEVASER

## NAVIGATING THE GREY AREAS : ACKNOWLEDGING AMBIGUITY IN THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL DEBATE

by Rabbi Menachem Genack

In the course of a conversation a few weeks ago with Congressman Robert Torricelli in his Washington office, he noted his concern with the political climate in Israel and expressed a fear that some extremist might try to kill Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In response, I reassured him with the comment: "Bob, you're wrong, a Jew could never kill another Jew."

To our shame, I was wrong; the assassin was a fellow Jew — indeed, a yeshiva student. As much as we try to save our collective conscience and say that this was an isolated act of a demented mind, we know that is not completely true. This heinous act did not occur in a vacuum. The incendiary, hateful rhetoric that has characterized the debate around the peace process, on both sides, triggered in an unstable mind this most unspeakable act. "The fact, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

In the aftermath of this tragedy and while the entire Jewish people are going through a period of introspection, let us see what the greatest Halakhist of our time, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, (the "Rav") had to say on the subject that lies at the core of the debate around the peace process, the return of the territories.

In my opinion, there are two aspects to the legacy of the Rav that are instructive on the issue with which we are seized. In 1967, shortly after the Six Day War, the Rav, before an audience exceeding a thousand people, declared that the appropriate forum to discuss and decide issues concerning the return of the territories was not a Rabbinical conference issuing responsa. That, in his opinion, was laughable. After all, the issue facing Israel was its security. Simply put, giving back territories would enhance the security of Israel, then the territories should be relinquished. On the other hand, if giving back territories would diminish the security of Israel, then the territories should be retained. The resolution of such an issue must necessarily be left to military men and people involved in geopolitics. To be sure, the security arguments on either side of the current debate are substantial, and what the Rav's opinion would be on the topic at this point in time is not for me to divine. But one thing is clear; he felt it was wrong to drape the issue in theological terms. While we always need a messianic vision, it is exceedingly dangerous to live a messianic existence prematurely.

There is yet another aspect of the Rav's legacy that should be mentioned. The Rav always understood that ambiguities in life are inherent to the human condition. Only God, from his infinite perspective, can speak with absolute infallibility. We, as finite, frail, limited, and mortal humans, must always recognize the contingency in every situation and acknowledge a degree of doubt. This is why the Rav often saw in different circumstances, as he did in a *sugya*, a multitude of possibilities. The harsh vicissitudes of Jewish history teach us that little in life is certain or immutable. Humility requires that we speak with less certainty. Unfortunately, the debate among the Jewish

people, both here and in Israel, is too often marked by dogmatic self-righteousness and theological certitude.

Recently, during a meeting with Senator William Cohen of Maine, he told me that he had been on an interview show with Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary. In the wake of the Oklahoma bombing, the two of them were asked to evaluate, on a scale of 1 to 10, the likelihood of a nuclear terrorist attack in the United States in the next five years. Secretary O'Leary pegged the likelihood at 5, and Senator Cohen gauged it at 8. We live in extraordinarily dangerous times. Nuclear material is still leaking out of the former Soviet Union. In short order, Israel's adversaries will have weapons of mass destruction. Had it not been for Menachem Begin's order to destroy the Osirek reactor in Iraq, the latter would already possess nuclear armaments. The almost certain introduction of weapons of mass destruction to the region is the real escalating danger to Israel. What Prime Minister Rabin was attempting to do, therefore, was to change the entire chemistry of the region. It remains, given Arab intransigence and Islamic fundamentalism, a great gamble. But who of us could have imagined even a few years ago, that there would be representatives in Jerusalem from Arab states at a funeral of the Prime Minister of Israel. Who of us could have imagined that the King of Jordan would have spoken as eloquently and emotionally of Yitzhak Rabin, his friend and comrade in the search for peace. The large gathering of world leaders on that sad day was a posthumous affirmation of his vision of peace.

Doubts, undoubtedly, plagued Prime Minister Rabin as well. His body language at the September 13th South Lawn ceremony communicated his loathing of Arafat, his trepidation and concern, but also his prayerful hope. Arafat's absence from his funeral was not only a political requirement, but a personal one, recognizing Rabin's attitude in life. Rabin recognized that his policy was not risk-free, but saw that the status quo was even riskier and tried to calibrate those risks. He stated in an interview with Charlie Rose that Israel's preemptive air attack on the Egyptian air force in 1967 left Israel with only seven jets to protect Israeli air space from Iraqi, Syrian, or Jordanian jets. It was a calculated risk, but it paid off.

Recognizing all these ambiguities in life and the nature of democratic society, we are all guilty in having remained silent when Prime Minister Rabin was vilified as a "traitor" and as a "murderer." Unfortunately, this unseemly aspect of Israeli life is not limited to the right. Demonstrations outside Prime Minister Begin's home, calling him a "murderer" helped to drive him from office and broke his spirit. Recently, the government put down peaceful demonstrations in Jerusalem harshly and with excessive force.

The destructive quality of Israeli politics is an unfortunate consequence of Israel's many wars and precarious situation, where every issue is viewed as an existential

one. We must all learn to disagree without assailing the motives of those who oppose us. We must teach our children passion without poison, commitment with civility.

Israel is a democratic society. The essence of democracy is that it can resolve disputes in a non-violent fashion. The bullet that killed Rabin was also aimed at Israel's democracy. Hateful invective, such as calling the Prime Minister a "traitor" and a "murderer," also undermines democracy. We must no longer tolerate intolerance. Its venom will poison the entire body politic. There are responsibilities of restraint required in a democracy.

About two years ago, a group of Orthodox Jewish leaders met with Prime Minister Rabin. I told him that President Clinton views him almost as a father figure, with deep affection and admiration. The President's moving words to his "*chaver*" at the funeral were testament to those feelings. We urged Rabin to be not only a bold leader, but also a father for the country. To be candid, that was not his style. He was a man without pretense, blunt, gruff, extremely analytical, with a keen intellect. He was stern with his enemies and allies alike. Openly contemptuous of the Jewish settlers, his remarks, at times harsh and insensitive, heightened their sense of fear and abandonment, but at all times his focus was on the safety of the nation and the security of its people.

In the process of the political debate, we often forget about our opponent's simple humanity. As we mourn Yitzhak Rabin, the valiant warrior, the heroic patriot, whose illustrious career was coextensive with the history of the State of Israel from its birth, we must also remember him as a husband, father, and grandfather. Who will ever forget the tearful words of his granddaughter, or the sight of his son, Yuval, reciting the *kaddish* at his father's grave? Rabin was the quintessential Israeli, hard-crusted, pragmatic, deeply committed to his people and his land, but with a hidden spiritual dimension. Though a brilliant practitioner of war, he was a man of peace.

The Bible tells us about the murder by Yoav, David ha-Melekh's "Chief of Staff," of Avner, formerly the commander of Shaul ha-Melekh's army, who had come to David to make peace and unite the warring factions within Israel. Avner was buried in Hebron, near the Cave of the Patriarchs. Our Rabbis comment that David buried Avner near the Patriarchs, so that when the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in their graves ask God what has impeded the pace of Israel's redemption, God will point to the grave of Avner, killed by a fellow Jew.

We mourn Yitzhak Rabin, in David ha-Melekh's words about Avner, "Know you that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel," knowing that we as a people are profoundly diminished.

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condemn the Rabin assassination. It was the ultimate distortion and perversion of Torah morality. If no forum is available, we must create one. Regardless of how large or small the audience, we must prevent the ongoing distortion of Torah and *chillul Hashem*. If we only succeed in reaching one person, the *chillul Hashem* will be that much smaller. That modest achievement will be infinitely valuable. How much more so if we reach larger numbers of people — friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances — we must try to the best of our ability to reach one and all.

We dare not remain silent at this critical hour. If we do not decry the distortion of Torah, contain the raging *chillul Hashem* and begin to heal the rift between secular and religious, the potential consequences are simply catastrophic. The year 1948 marked the birth of the modern

Jewish state. We had a sovereign state previously, almost two millennia ago. How did we lose the Hasmonean state? Its decay and dissolution were due to internal strife, civil war. And prior to the Hasmonean state, the last Jewish governorship was held by Gedaliah ben Achikam. That too we lost. Gedaliah was assassinated by a fellow Jew! God forbid, we must not allow history to repeat itself.

The internal strife, intensified a thousand-fold by the Rabin assassination, poses the greatest threat to Israel's security in her history. Greater than Nasser's Arab Federation who boasted that they would drive Israel into the sea. Greater than Saddam Hussein who vowed to inundate Israel with chemical warheads. The reason is simple: God will not allow the *resha'im* to implement their evil schemes. We can not be complacent and take for granted God's mercy. And yet we know where God stands. He stands in front of his children. But if, God forbid, His children fight

with each other... We must act now.

And, finally, we must cleanse our hearts and souls. We must scrub them clean of arrogant omniscience and intolerance. We must uproot hatred, and in its place, cultivate love and respect. And these critical values must be transmitted to our children as well. At home and in Yeshiva. Teaching them about *shabbat*, *kashrut*, and *taharat ha-mishpacha* will not suffice; we must teach them legitimate tolerance and love as well. Surely, tolerance and love are no substitutes for shabbat observance. But then shabbat observance is no substitute for tolerance. We must transmit the totality of Torah, or risk it becoming perverted and distorted into *Lot morality*. May Hashem grant us the strength and wisdom to do His will!

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# THE EMBERS OF CHURBAN BAYIT SHENI : SIN'AT CHINNAM PAST AND PRESENT

by Yoni Kristt

Secular Jews, religious Jews. The political rivalry, rooted in a deep religious schism that polarizes Judaism, erupts in violence. Finally, Jew raises deadly weapon to fellow Jew who falls dead. Jewish blood taints the Land of Israel. Jews committed the ultimate form of *sin'at chinnam shefikhat damim*.

The nightmarish scenario into which Yigal Amir's actions plunged us echoes that of another era. Chazal attribute the destruction of the Second Temple to this self-same sin. Despite ubiquitous fulfillment of mitzvot including even *gemilat chasadim*, despite widespread Torah study, the generation of the Second Temple became known in posterity primarily for its *sin'at chinnam*.

"But the Second Temple, [during which] they occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot, and gemilat chasadim, why was it destroyed? Because there was *sin'at chinnam*."

(B. Yoma 9b).

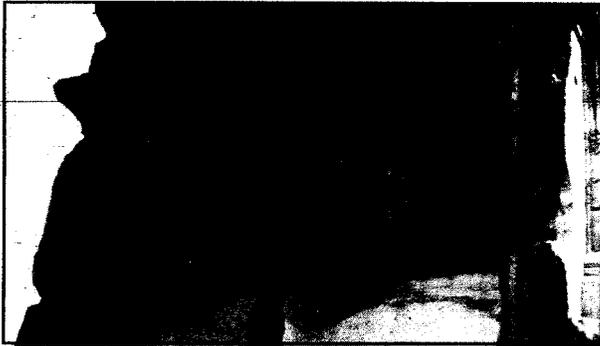
In general, Chazal intend statements such as this to be understood allegorically, not historically. For example, when they ascribe the destruction of the First Temple to the three cardinal sins of *shefikhat damim*, *gilluy arayot*, and *avoda zara*, they did not mean that Nevuchadnezzar viewed himself as an avenging angel punishing the Jews for their sins, rather that God allowed Nevuchadnezzar to conquer *Eretz Yisrael* as a Divine punishment. But here the allegorical and the historical merge as one: *sin'at chinnam* not only was the pre-eminent sin of the era, but in a very "real" sense divided the Jewish nation, undermined the Jewish governments, crippled the Jewish war effort against the Romans, and finally featured prominently in Jerusalem's destruction. As Vespasian himself observed to his generals who counseled attacking Jerusalem directly, "... by waiting he would find fewer enemies, when they had wasted their numbers in sedition. God was a better general than he, and was delivering the Jews to the Romans without any exertion on their part and bestowing victory upon them without risk to Roman generalship. Consequently, while their adversaries were perishing by their own hands and suffering from that worst of calamities, civil strife, their part was rather to sit as distant spectators of their perils, than to contend with men who courted death and were raving against one another." (Josephus, *The Jewish War* IV.369-371)

But the striking similarities between then and now extend beyond the mere expression of internal divisiveness. Diagnosing the dominating sectarian tendencies of both reveals underlying fundamental-religious differences. Unlike the present, the past can be studied objectively, and can enable us to better understand the events and passions of our own time without the distortion of a *noge'a badavar*.

The rifts in Second Temple society reflected increasing Hellenistic presence in the physical, political, and cultural arenas. Greece's impact first began to be felt at the time of Alexander the Great's conquest of Israel. Among other concessions, the Jewish leaders agreed to name all males born during that year after Alexander (hence the widespread usage among even extremist Orthodox Jews of such blatantly gentile names as Alexander or Sender). This, along with a Greek political infrastructure implemented by Alexander and his successor, created an opening for Greek language and culture to begin to creep into Jewish society. The translation of Tanakh into Greek under Ptolemy, the Septuagint, opened the crack even farther. As Judaea increased its economic and social ties to the Greek

cities of the enveloping Greek empire, more and more Jews began to speak Greek, Hellenize their names, and even join the gymnasium — a symbol of Greek culture. The crack widened into a breach of such magnitude that it could never be repaired.

In a trend that continues to this day, the greater the influx of foreign culture, the greater the backlash. In 106 B. C. E., Mattityahu and his five sons led the Hasmonean revolt against not only the Greeks, but Hellenized Jews as well. But despite a convincing military victory by the Hasmoneans, the Hellenizing process continued through the next two hundred years. As foreign culture and political dominance increased, so did harsh taxes and economic hardship. Not surprisingly, in this atmosphere of religious, political, and economic stress, numerous extremist groups appeared. While most of Classical Jewry fell under the labels of Pharisee, Sadducee, or Essene, a Fourth Philosophy emerged on the scene. While primarily Pharisee in nature, they added on an extreme emphasis on the importance of liberty and Jewish domination over *Eretz Yisrael*. In their mind, given the option of Roman domination or death, there could be only one answer; unlike the



Pharisees, they chose death. They dealt with anyone who disagreed as a traitor and a heretic; no treaty or compromise could be reached with the enemy. They, or at least a sub-sect among them, even went so far as to publicly assassinate their opponents; they were known as the *Sicarii* after the daggers (*sica* in Latin) they wore under the garments and used in this dastardly fashion.

We come now the Great Revolt of the Jews and the events leading up to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 C. E., a story typified — according to all sources, be they Rabbinic or secular — by warring extremist parties massacring each other and jockeying for supremacy while the Roman legions lurked in the background, conquering all in their path. Benjamin Franklin once said, "We must hang together or we shall surely hang apart"; *ba-avonotenu ha-rabbim*, we hung apart. Among numerous atrocious examples of *sin'at chinnam* and *shefikhat damim*, the most famous being the burning of Jerusalem's stores, one story bears special relevance. At one point, one man — Ananus by name — spoke up for peace. Despite gaining popularity among the populace of Jerusalem, or perhaps because of his popularity, the Zealots (yet another sub-sect that ascribed to the Fourth Philosophy) arranged for his murder. Josephus, in describing his death, writes that the last chance for peace died with Ananus.

While the situation in *Eretz Yisrael* in no way approaches the horrors of first century Palestinian life, we now find ourselves hurdling down a similar path. Once more, foreign culture — no longer Greek and Roman, but

now American and European — permeates all aspects of Israeli life. Again the temptation to accept the alien, not only from religious, ideal, or folk-theology, but from economic ones, as well. And again, a rift divides *Eretz Yisrael*: secular versus religious, left wing versus right wing. The secularists fail to appreciate *kele hat ha-aretz* and demand acceptance of and acceptance into the religion-free international community. And (not a moral, and Halakhically repugnant, religious, basic Jewish) place Jewish sovereignty of *Eretz Yisrael* over the 613 mitzvot. Each side, in alienating the other, widens the rift even further. We too, in attempting to walk the tightrope of the center, have failed in our task. Instead of turning outward and attempting to bridge the gap, we have narrowly, went on our way, combating the symptoms of society's ills, not their sources. And once again those who dare to challenge the extreme positions (of either side) on any grounds, be they Halakhic, military, or practical, are vilified, once more, the *Sicarii* have begun to emerge. They have struck down the Ananus of our time. Admittedly, Rabin's government sought to achieve parity with the other nations of the world both culturally and economically. Ancient, "out-

dated" religious practices merely obstructed the process, and thus were discarded by the wayside. They disregarded the cost in holy Jewish land and holy Jewish blood in their efforts to become just another secular nation. But his death, far from arresting this momentum has only unleashed more virulently the antireligious fervor boiling throughout Israeli society. Jewish cemeteries are being desecrated by Jews. There is talk of imposing martial law and of closing down *Yeshivot Heider*.

But clearly the blame lies not in them alone. Rather it is we who must bear the lion's share for alienating them. But we destroy ourselves not just vis-a-vis the *chiloni* world. Even within our own camp, the ugly specter of infighting has begun to emerge. Could we have imagined *Rabbanim* with bodyguards? Being frisked before hearing a *shiu'*? These are becoming our reality. Yet, voices continue to shout venomous slogans at the other side. And for what gain? The peace process rolls on, now — more than ever — crushing its opponents and tarring them with the brush of advocating murder.

Undoubtedly such a grave sin demands *teshuvah* on a national scale. But *charata al ha-avur* alone cures nothing. We need *kabala al ha-atid*. We must learn the lessons of both modern and ancient history, and we must turn from the path that leads us to a repetition of *Churban Bayit Sheni* (*rachmana litzlan*). We must obliterate all traces of the present rift and attack not the *chiloni*, but his status as a *chiloni*. Instead of vilifying the opposition, we must bring them close. Be this in the religious or political arena, violence — and even just violent rhetoric — is not only ineffective, but entirely unacceptable. Murdering a fellow Jew over political differences, while more extreme, is no more absurd than fire-bombing bus-stops to eliminate inmodest posters or stoning cars which drive on Shabbat. Instead we must teach *chiloni*, *charedi*, Kachnick, Eyal-nick, and even ourselves what it means to be a *goy ehad ba-aretz*, an *am kadosh be-makom kadosh*. If not, if we only sit passively as politician and rabbi alike continue to inflame passions already over the brink, once more we will have granted free reign to both the Hellenizers and the terrorists of the Fourth Philosophy. Once more, *rachmana litzlan*, we will have brought upon us the physical and religious devastation of *churban*.

# HAMEVASER

## BEN HA-CHAYYIM U-VEN HA-MAVET : RELIGIOUS ZIONISM AT A CROSSROADS

by Daniel Yolkut

There was a time when the secular community in Israel respected the *chillul Hashem* world when the youths who were *eret* scoundrels, seemed to embody the type of ideals upon which the state was founded at the very time when the children of the founders had lost interest in those ideals, and when the students of the Yeshiva of Heder fought "like lions" in defense of Israel in the Yom Kippur War and in Lebanon. Today, the *sinna scanga* has become perverted into a symbol of zealotry and murder, of shooting Arabs at prayer and Prime Ministers in cold blood, of *chillul Hashem* on an unprecedented scale. To the predominantly secular Israeli populace, the Torah that we praise every evening as "our lives and the length of our days" is becoming a symbol of insanity and evil. If the religious Zionist community does not quickly re-evaluate itself, we run the risk of unbridgeable chasms even more potentially fatal than the rift that threatens to tear *Eretz Yisrael* in two: a split of *am Yisrael* into those who observe the Torah and those who want no part of it. It is therefore with a heavy heart and in respect for the tremendous *mesirat neshah* of the settlers of Yehuda, Shomron, and Azza that I attempt to suggest where our camp went wrong — and how we can still save ourselves.

In 1967, the religious Zionist community swelled with joy as the *eret avot*, the heartland of *Eretz Yisrael*, the Shekhem and Bet El of Avraham Avinu, the Bet Lechem of Rut and Naomi; the Chevron where the Davidic kingdom began, *Har Ha-Bayit*, the junction of heaven and earth, were returned, after thousands of years, to *am Yisrael*. The mission wholeheartedly embraced by the religious Zionist community was to fulfill the prophecy of Yirmiyahu, "and children will return to their borders." And so idealistic *benet Torah* from Heder and *benet Torah* from Ulpanot began to dot the sacred hills of Yehudah and Shomron

with tents, trailers and red toyed homes. What had at the turn of the century been the province of secularists and heretics had become the mission of young people afire with love for Hashem and His Land — the settling of *Eretz Yisrael*. These values were what we passed on to more than a generation of youth. And then something went terribly wrong and last *motza'ei Shabbat* three bullets were shot through the heart of religious Zionism. As we watched in horror, a *almid* of Yeshivat Kerem Be-Yavneh, the mother of Heder Yeshivot, and of Bar Ilan University, the only religious university in Israel, raised a pistol; aimed, and fired at the Prime Minister of Israel. Over the past week, the shock waves of the *chillul Hashem* radiated outward as more *benet Yeshiva* were implicated in the murder and these facts were reported and analyzed by the media, world-

wide. For twenty-five years, the lion's share of idealism in our community has been devoted to settlement of *Eretz Yisrael*. This almost single-minded obsession contributed to the transformation of otherwise pious, gentle *benet Yeshiva* into murderers. Possibly even more distressing, though, is that in the process we have neglected to emphasize what may be our most important mission: winning the hearts and minds of *Kelal Yisrael*. The *charedi* community has distanced itself from the Israeli populace to such a degree that they may be incapable of reaching them with the message of Torah. We were capable of touching *chiloni* Israel until last *motza'ei Shabbat*, and I hope and pray that we are still capable of touching them even after that *chillul Hashem*. In order to do that, I believe that we must radically re-examine our opinions of the peace process, swallow our pride, and consider the possibility that fighting for complete control of Yehudah ve-Shomron may be unrealistic at this point at best, and at worst, serve to

amplify the *chillul Hashem* of recent events. While we must not allow ourselves to endorse the peace process if we feel that it constitutes national suicide, I believe that it is also incumbent upon us to reapproach, with open minds, the question of whether anything less than 1967 cease-fire lines really is national suicide, or if a *modus vivendi* can be found with the Palestinian entity. With many secular Israelis quite understandably angered at what is perceived as Orthodox fanatics forcing Israeli boys to die to protect their settlements, we must not give the anti-religious more material with which to attack us.

What is necessary is for us to do is to channel all of the emotion and passion that we have used to build settlements and fight Oslo II into *ahavat Yisrael*, *chinukh*, and *kiruv leavot*. Israel must be reminded that the Torah stands for more than maximalist borders and restrictive marriage codes, that Shabbat is more than a day at the beach with buses that do not run, that the State of Israel is more than Italy or Spain on the Eastern Mediterranean. This can only be accomplished through intelligent, articulate, unpatronizing presentation of what Torah has to offer the modern Israeli, delivered with love and respect, and by shifting our focus we may be able to affect this necessary change before it's too late.

Every inch of *Eretz Yisrael* is monumentally holy, and the thought of the temporary return of any area of *Eretz Yisrael* to non-Jewish control should pain us "like an amputation," as one Rosh Yeshiva put it. But even more terrifying should be the image of another large segment of *Kelal Yisrael* estranged, perhaps permanently, from her God and His Torah. And unlike the case of the land, our community will bear much of the guilt for the split of the nation.

## AYEKHA HA-ADAM : WHAT HAS BECOME OF YOU, HUMANITY?

by Yair Silverman

The *pasuk* from Eikha reverberated through my mind as I heard the tragic news of our leader's assassination. "Lo he'eminu... ki yavo tzar ve-oyev ba-sha'arei Yerushalayim" — "We could not believe... that a tragedy and an enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem" (4:12). Just as it was inconceivable to the people of the First Temple period that an enemy's footsteps might defile Jerusalem, who could have imagined that a fellow Jew could kill the Prime Minister of the Jewish state! Could we have forgotten "Lo tirtzach"? How many Jewish educators ever conceived that they would have the task of reminding their pupils of this axiomatic moral imperative? Look to what depths we have fallen!

The first reports of the murder reached me during the last moments of Shabbat. I was at a shabbaton in which most of New York's various Modern/Orthodox high schools were represented. Their reaction to Rabin's murder was somewhat frightening. The teenagers tried to assess if, perhaps, this tragedy was a positive event. While Rabin had never been presented by these student's educators as the desired leader of the Jewish nation, it was still inconceivable to me how the murder of a Jew, by a Jew could ever be met with such an uncertain response. As Shabbat departed I felt that it was necessary to dispel the horrific perception that this murder was acceptable behavior. I suggested that we examine the actions of David Hamelekh, Jewish political leader par-excellence. After Shaul was killed, David cried out that the Jewish people have lost its leader, mourning him bitterly in spite of the fact that Shaul was his political rival and mortal enemy. David's reaction

transcended any personal considerations concerning the legitimate leadership of *Am Yisrael*. David knew he was the true leader; a prophet assured him that his course was correct. Yet, he reacted in such a passionate way to Shaul's death. In our generation, we have no such certitude of the divine will. Only one thing is certain and undebatable: this past Saturday night the political leader of *Am Yisrael* was taken from us.

Unfortunately, we find similar moral ambivalence even among more mature elements of our community. I must stress that it is not the majority, or even a sizable minority of our circle who have celebrated in wake of the assassination. However, even these few misguided individuals represent a significant threat. Just as a cancer can start with only a few cells, these misconceptions can spread, and will spread, if not combated. We must stand vigilant against inflammatory ideas that only serve to negate our natural morality and dehumanize others. We must not allow morally repugnant ideas to find a fertile resting ground within our confines.

Rabbi Avi Weiss so eloquently proclaimed that "the true test of respect is not respecting those you agree with, that is easy; rather it is respecting those you don't agree with." I am horrified to think that we have become like other nations in the Middle East which resort to violence when they do not agree with others. I beg and plead that this not be the case. Yitzhak Rabin was not a dictator. He was a democratically elected leader, whose removal should have been achieved by free elections, not through the cowardly bullets of an assassin. Our Prime Minister, in his ser-

vice toward the Land of Israel dedicated a vast majority of his 73 years towards the betterment of the Jewish people. He was one of the last active leaders who was instrumental in the creation of the state. His concern for our security never wavered; even if his methods of attainment shifted during his last years. Rabin, with exceptional determination and courage, believed that reconciliation between Jews and Arabs was not just a necessary capitulation, but a Jewish aspiration. Rambam teaches us that: "Great is peace, for the entire Torah was given only for the sake of making peace in the world." (*Chanuka* 4:14). Even those in Israel who oppose Rabin's actions on the pragmatic political level still covet lasting peace as a Jewish ideal. The debate centered only over what methods should be used in achieving this universal goal. Just as the king of the Khazars was told "your intentions are good and pleasing even if your actions are not," no responsible person would deny that Rabin had hoped to achieve a real peace for Israel.

Others among us have tried to distance themselves from this tragedy by claiming that: "Rabin is not our leader. He is an Israeli leader, not a Jewish one." My first and immediate reaction was to think of how strongly the *Haggadah* condemned the evil son: "Because you have removed your self from the group — we smash out your teeth." Likewise, Rambam codifies that any Jew who does not feel the pain of his fellow Jew is a cruel person and consequently, not part of our nation (*Ta'ani* 1:3). Therefore, when one part of the nation is pained each individual

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# MURDER REVISITED

by Tzvi Pittinsky

The first rumors came out as we were *davening mincha*. Yitzchak Rabin had been assassinated. First, I was shocked. Even after we received confirmation of the news, I just could not believe that this could have happened. As my attitude shifted from shock to numbing acceptance, I held out the hope that Prime Minister Rabin had not been killed by a fellow Jew. Soon my worst fears were confirmed: the assassin was Jewish — worse, a religious Jew.

The critical question is the following: what perverted Yigal Amir, a fellow yeshiva graduate and college student, into a cold-blooded killer? This is not the first such act perpetrated by an otherwise reputable Orthodox Jew in the recent past. Only two years ago, the murders of Baruch Goldstein shocked us. How has our era become one noted for such extreme *sin'at chinam*? Finally, is there anything we can do to remedy this before it is too late?

A formulation of Rambam helps to clarify these issues. In Shemoneh Perakim, Rambam distinguishes between two types of *mitzvoth*, the religious commandments and the ethical commandments. Rambam maintains that the desire to violate *religious* commandments, such as the prohibition of meat and milk, is not inherently wrong. On the other hand, even the *desire* to violate the *ethical* commandments, such as the prohibition on murder, should provoke a visceral negative reaction. We must view murder not just as something proscribed by the Torah, but as an act of evil. We should be disgusted by murder and violence. This reaction must be automatic and unequivocal. An innate ethical sensitivity and sensibility should accompany a person's religious observance. And if one does not experience disgust over such actions, he should work on himself until he attains this moral sensitivity.

After Baruch Goldstein's act of mass murder, I was deeply disturbed by the apparent lack of ethical sensitivity shown by my peers. People justified his actions and some even condoned them. Even the reactions of some religious leaders to Baruch Goldstein seemed to be lacking. Not that — God forbid — any legitimate authorities outrightly condoned what Baruch Goldstein did. But some Rabbis failed to react against his actions while others made only a lukewarm response to what had occurred — not to mention those who muted their reaction to this heinous crime in order to attack the peace process. There were those who suggested that, although we should reject Baruch Goldstein's methods, we sympathize with his basic motivations. Such conditional responses, attempts towards understanding the motivations that led Baruch Goldstein to perpetrate this act, may have been appropriate for the psychologist's chair but, in a public forum, are tantamount to a justification of the deed.

Such lackluster reactions did nothing to temper the venom of the radical fringe groups from which Baruch Goldstein sprung, and instead gave these groups a certain validation. Baruch Goldstein became a martyr in certain circles. He was the icon of trading cards and key chains. His grave became a shrine for radicals and zealots. Books extolling his deeds, one of which, *Baruch ha-Geyer*, was found in Yigal Amir's room, were not uncommon in the religious world. This, I believe, contributed to the feelings of a Yigal Amir, and it was our failure to react with passion and intensity to Baruch Goldstein which created an atmosphere that encouraged such violence. This gave the impetus for a Yigal Amir to carry out the assassination of the Prime Minister.

Dennis Prager, a commentator on the contemporary American scene, said, "Ethics without God leads to Communism. God without ethics leads to Khloiment." God without ethics also leads to Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir. We, as observant Jews, can sometimes become so engrossed in Halakic sources that we lose our moral sensitivity. This sense of moral outrage is the trait endemic to the descendants of Avraham. We must never forget this *midat ha-cheved*. Therefore, the only response to the actions of a Baruch Goldstein or a Yigal Amir is one of unconditional condemnation.

The sociologists tell us that violence begets violence. The dictum of "*avera goveret avera*" confirms this. We intuitively know this to be true but in the past we have hesitated to stand up to the violence of the Right. This could perhaps be because we view these people as stemming from our own political and religious camp. They study in the same *yeshivot* that many of us have attended and share our views about the Rabin government. They may be more extreme than we but they are still on our side. But we can no longer afford to express such sentiments. How many more horrible tragedies must we experience before we unequivocally condemn these acts of violence? This is no longer an issue of politics, but one of human lives.

We must not seek to understand the political views that lead these madmen to do these actions. We must condemn them, without hesitation, without explaining ourselves. If the Jewish leadership would stand together in universal condemnation, the fanatics who incite this violence would be isolated and weakened. But time is running out. I am afraid to think of the future consequences for Kelal Yisrael if we do not end this violence now. As Chazal point out, *sin'at chinam* caused this long exile. Let us end the hatred that emanates from our community now, before it is too late.

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must feel that pain. Just as one can not separate parts of one's body, one can not dissect segments of the Jewish nation from the cohesive whole — and the political leader of the only Jewish state in the world, in the land promised by God to Avraham Avinu, certainly has a connection to each and every Jew, regardless of that leader's personal religious piety and observance.

The Torah tells us that when a body is found outside of a city the elders of the nearest city must come forth and proclaim that: "Our hands have not spilt this blood." We too must ask ourselves what we did, or did not do, that could have contributed to this moral deterioration. It is not the time to point fingers at others but rather to look inward at ourselves. There is no Jew, whether religious or secular, who did not have some part in allowing this moral abyss to develop. Radicals on both sides of the political spectrum are guilty of the dehumanization of the opponent's camp. Our shame and guilt is manifested by our statements and actions and through our unresponsiveness to the rhetoric of others.



# TOLERANCE & INTROSPECTION

by

Efrat Altshul Schorr & Rivky Schramm

In the past, the banner of religion that we proudly waved represented a rigorous moral standard. We exhibited values that distinguished us from other peoples: tolerance, giving the benefit of the doubt, and above all, the unconditional acceptance of law. These values were never readily obvious to all, but, rather, required honest and often tough self-examination both within the sources of Jewish tradition and the individual's conscience. The reward of this demanding, difficult life was the satisfaction of knowing that one's life was saturated with meaning and inspired with sanctity.

In examining the reality of the religious community today, the moral standard that is maintained by some would be unrecognizable to those religious Jews of the past. We have embraced within our community even those groups which speak the language of militant hatred. These are not the values of our tradition; they are foreign and antithetical to our moral fiber. As these values destroy the religious community, they undermine and pervert the tradition that we have inherited.

The system that this cherished tradition inspired, has gradually deteriorated and now demands reevaluation. Since when has hatred become so acceptable? Intercommunal relations are now grounded in distrust and suspicion. Has violence has become an acceptable, even normative, means of expression of dissent? Moreover, intolerance has become so widespread that the Jewish people are no longer recognizable as a cohesive unit.

An entire nation cannot be held accountable for the actions of one individual. After all, each individual is endowed with the ability to act as he/she chooses. However, we as a nation do bear responsibility for nurturing the environment that produced Yigal Amir. Had Yigal Amir been an unstable escapee from a psychiatric ward, the repercussions of his action would not be as devastating to the very essence of our religious identity. Rather, he was the product of ostensibly mainstream religious educational institutions, strikingly similar to Stern and Yeshiva College. The role of such institutions is to instill fundamental Jewish values in their students. However, at best, these institutions have sat idly by while hatred, violence and intolerance have infiltrated their value system. These institutions that are intended to represent our value system have failed to reject these prejudices with the necessary force to combat their terrific destructive power. The humiliating reality is that some teachers and leaders within these institutions promote the hatred, violence, and intolerance that encourage the senseless and unproductive acts that threaten our community.

Ironically, in our attempts to foster a higher tolerance, we may often find the need to express intolerance of our own to those segments of the population which utilize extreme measures in their rejection of the opinions of others. Judaism encourages discussion and debate about issues, it is the arguments of the Gemara that serves as the foundation of our Halakha. However, physical violence has never been an acceptable method of coercing others to adopt differing views. Arguments, however passionate, must remain in the realm of verbal discussion. Violence perpetrated by one Jew against another is absolutely inexcusable, not only does it violate the Halakha, it destroys the very hallmark of Jewish morality — the fundamental respect for human life.

## EULOGY FOR PRIME MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN

by Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

delivered at Yeshiva University on November 6, 1995

The victim was a general, a celebrated hero of his people, deeply involved in the diplomatic and political issues of government. He came to this rendezvous unsuspecting, in peace, wanting peace, expecting peace. Followed by the assassin, he knew nothing of what lay in store for him. But then the stalking assassin struck and, within a moment, the leader lay dead — and not by an enemy of Israel, but by the hand of a fellow Jew.

Thus was Avner ben Ner killed by Yoav (Shmuel II 3:26,27). When King David heard the news he was horrified, and at the funeral he pronounced the following immortal words:

"Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put in chains."

One would have expected him to die a hero's death gloriously, on the field of battle, slain by an enemy in the course of combat on behalf of his people. Instead, he was done in by one of his own who came silently, in stealth.

We assemble here today to mourn and honor a modern Avner ben Ner. And we are filled with grief and apprehension. Let me begin my eulogy by referring to a *sigva* you are now in the midst of learning. There is a form of oath called an *issar*, whereby one swears he will not eat meat or drink wine and here the Talmud gives four examples: "as on the day my father died; as on the day so-and-so died; as on the day Gedaliah ben Ahikam was killed; as on the day I saw Jerusalem in its destruction."

I can understand *yom she-met bo aviv* — the day one's father was deceased is very personal. *Yom she-met bo ploni* — the day a certain acquaintance died is certainly a human consideration. *Yom she-ra'ah yerushalayim be-churbanah* — the day one saw Jerusalem's tragedy is one of national significance. But why *yom she-neherag bo Gedaliah ben Ahikam*, the day that Gedaliah, governor of Judea, was murdered? I suggest the following answer: The assassination of Gedaliah included all three of the above — the personal, the human and the national elements and, in addition, had fateful consequences for the future of an entire people.

So it is with Yitzhak ben Nehemiah Rabin: We have lost a human being — not the caricature depicted by those who demonized and dehumanized him. Direct yet thoughtful, tough but introspective, unceremonious, even humble, always tense and nervous — which he had every reason to be...

Yeshiva, and I as an individual, had a personal relationship with him. Yeshiva gave him an honorary degree, and he spoke before Yeshiva University audiences at a number of occasions since. Personally, I met him a number of times, since his days as Ambassador to the U.S., and at all times I found him to react with *derekh eretz*. He was always respectful, personally deferential, courteous, and with the highest regard for this institution. Losing him is *ke-yom she-met bo aviv*, much like losing a highly regarded and respected authority figure in one's family.

Third, he was a national, even international figure witness the remarkable and unprecedented array of the world's greatest leaders who attended his funeral just a few hours ago. He was the liberator of Jerusalem, and his death is akin to "seeing Jerusalem in its destruction."

And, most important, just as the murder of Gedaliah led to the dissolution of the Jewish state and the beginning of the hardest part of *galut*, so the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin may leave in its wake consequences as disastrous as they are unforeseen and unforeseeable. *Avlut*, mourning, contains within it an element of *teshuvah*, repentance. It is therefore appropriate for us to undertake a *chesbon hanefesh*, to examine ourselves and learn if we can in any way improve what we are doing and how we are acting, so as to avoid such catastrophes in the future.

Let me begin these few ruminations by saying that in addition to shock and grief, I for one experienced a vital element of *teshuvah*, and that is *husha*, shame. I am chagrined that it was a Jew who murdered the Prime Minister. I was always proud that Jews do not behave in this way... And I am deeply embarrassed that it was one of us — a religious university student, who did it — even if he is a mad man... Yigal Amir and Baruch Goldstein were, otherwise, fine representatives of what we stand for. So we have a lot of thinking and pondering to do.

Most everyone possesses within himself a seething cauldron of passions, noxious energies that, if released, can destroy recklessly and with abandon. But we have been civilized — by Torah, by social sanctions, by parental training, by moral conscience. That constraining inhibition is powerful in most people, often as powerful as steel. With others, the lid that holds down the boiling pot of emotions is made of weaker stuff, the psychological equivalent of plastic and glue. But in a few unfortunate individuals, that cover is no more than paper. The inner curbs against bloodlust, violence, rape, and murder are no stronger than tissue paper, tied down with gossamer threads spun by a weary and ineffective spider. A person so poorly endowed can lead an otherwise normal life for a long time, but place him in an environment that is permissive of violence, that exposes him to harsh talk, to hype, to unrestrained overstatement, to irrational and undisciplined expression — and anti-social urges buried deep within his sick psyche will explode in an unspeakably ugly display of hostility that turns men into monsters, society into a jungle, and civilization into chaos.

Our responsibility is to avoid such an environment, never to be guilty of having, knowingly or unknowingly, directly or indirectly, encouraged such bestiality. Our responsibility is to be responsible, to recognize that violent rhetoric invariably leads to violent deeds. In the absence of such awareness, we stand accused of having prepared the ground for the explosion of such malevolence by people of weak restraint, like a sewer blowing its cover and uncontrollably spewing forth its odious and miasmic gases.

Let us say it: we should never have permitted ourselves the luxury of escalating political differences to such heights of hatred — and such depths of depravity.

Let us never again, in Jerusalem or in New York or elsewhere, call a respected leader of Israel a "traitor." Let no one tolerate irresponsible individuals who dare to refer to the Prime Minister of Israel, no matter of what party, as a Nazi. And let us silence those raucous voices of vicious discord who declare that it is a *mitzva* to assassinate a Prime Minister of the State of Israel!

Remember what King Solomon taught: *ha-chayyim ve-ha-mavet be-yad ha-lashon* — words can bring joy and enhance life; and words — oral or written — can also hurt and maim and destroy and kill.

I want to make it clear: Nothing in what I say should be construed as approving or disapproving of the Rabin policies; condemning or condoning statements he may have made. That is precisely the point that I wish to make: We may deplore what a man says — we may even find it deceitful and hateful — but never may we denigrate his *tselmei elokim*, the divine image which confers upon him his basic human dignity. We may oppose, however strongly, the policy, but not savage the personality. That is not the way of any morally mature and responsible, sensitive human being, and certainly not the way of *benei Torah*, people who study Torah.

The murder of Yitzhak Rabin should put all of us on notice: Tone down irresponsible rhetoric, which creates the ambience for irresponsible deeds, even the foulest of them.

Beware of ever lightly cloaking political views, no matter how much you believe in them, in the mantle of Halakha, because that is *megaleh panim ba-Torah she-lo ke-halakha*, of improper manipulation of the Law. These are issues of such historic import that only a Sanhedrin can decide them on the basis of Halakha, or whose decision has the status of Halakha. No one in this generation may arrogate that prerogative to himself.

And keep far away from excessive self-confidence that leads to arrogant self-righteousness that, in turn, persuades us that our ideals are greater and better than those of the other fellow; that we are sincere and he is not; that we are unquestionably right and he is indubitably wrong; that we are therefore entitled to force our views on him — by "eliminating" him if need be, in order to have our "truth" prevail.

Such arrogance and such invitation to violence and such rhetorical extremism must come to an end — whether in the Knesset or in party precincts, whether of the Left (the extremists of which demonized the late Menachem Begin) or the Right, the religious or the secular, whether in Merkaz Harav or in Yeshiva University. Yes, Yeshiva University...

We must develop a new sensitivity to extremism of  
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