

Young Zionist

The 13th Anniversary of Yitzhak Rabin's Murder

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Shortly before the thirteenth anniversary of the death of Yitzhak Rabin, I offered a pack of educational materials to schools and youth movements for Rabin memorial day. I was surprised when I received more than one response saying that these materials would be unnecessary. I am disturbed, but not because some UK Jewish pro-Israel organizations do not feel that this day should be on their agenda. Israel engagement is complex and the issue can understandably be perceived as an Israeli internal issue. I am troubled more because I think this is not the reason for the lack of interest shown; I suspect it has something to do with the political connotations of Rabin's assassination. Not that *chas ve chalila* I have heard any sympathy for the actual crime, but there is undoubtedly some uneasiness present if one's political sympathies opposed the Oslo Accords. If this is the real reason for not taking part in the memorial then I strongly believe that something has to be done about it.

A feeling of disregard for Rabin's memorial is not an issue unique to the UK or even to the Diaspora, but one that is shared in the Diaspora and in Israel. On *Mozei Shabbat*, Rabin Square, formerly *Kikar Malchai Yisrael*, where the assassination took place, hosted a remembrance rally. For some years now there has been a steady criticism of some of the memorial events that have taken place, a criticism with which I identify. The Knesset passed a law which set ground rules for an annual memorial to take place in state offices, IDF camps and schools. In schools, Remembrance Day takes the form of activities that focus on the personality and deeds of Yitzhak Rabin (*דמותו ופועלו*), denounce violence and enhance the value of democracy.

The main issue is of course the interpretation of Yitzhak Rabin's legacy. **Too many put the focus on Rabin's political views and specifically the peace process for which he was ultimately murdered. Is this the legacy we are obligated by law to remember?** If that is the case then this is not a national memorial day, rather a memorial day only for the political left wing.

Indeed, reports on this year's rally portray the overall atmosphere of a mainly left wing political festival. It is enough to glance at the footage below; one cannot escape the giant balloons depicting the insignia of the left political parties.

It is sad that, thirteen years after Yitzhak Rabin's murder, Israeli society and its leaders have not yet mastered the proper and dignified way in which we should commemorate the event.

The law passed by the Knesset is for all citizens and so is this memorial day. I think that Tzipi Livny, quoted on Jpost, who attended this year's rally, articulated this very well. I didn't vote for Rabin, but he was my prime minister as well... we can return [the state of] Israel to what it was meant to be ... a state where political difference will never end with bullet fire. A state that understands that its struggle is not only for its physical existence but also for its moral image and values. President Peres also quoted in the article, noting the disparity of attendance at the rally and wishing that next year the segments of the community that do not currently see themselves as part of this memorial day will attend as well. In my opinion, for this to happen the state memorial service (private services should of course cater for

the appropriate audience) needs to shift its focus from the politically dividing statements that currently characterise the event. All political symbols should be left at home.

So what should the message be and why do I think that this day is important to make note of in the UK as well? I feel strongly that in years to come, the enormity of the assassination of a Jewish leader during the third independent ruling era in the land of Israel will be fully appreciated. If we hope to prolong this era how can we condone such a form of behaviour? Any community that cares about the wellbeing of the state of Israel should be concerned with ensuring that it is not condoned.

Although this was not the first case of internal Jewish assassination it was never an acceptable form of action, and was in the past carried out mainly by destructive zealots. The prophet Elijah was a self proclaimed zealot. The book of Kings describes at length the severe argument he had with Ahab and Izebel, the rulers of Israel in his time. In the view of the book of Kings, the calamity of their actions surpassed those that were criticized under the government of Yitzhak Rabin. When Elijah meets with King Ahab one on one, even in his extreme zealotness, he does not resort to assassination to resolve the conflict. It seems that it was clear, centuries before the invention of democracy, that there are certain actions that are beyond the accepted norms of conduct. In our tradition this is not the way of the spirit of the almighty, and there is something to be learned from Elijah's (in)action!

I hope that on the fourteenth anniversary of Rabin's assassination, we can take at least a few moments to reflect and to teach the next generation about how remarkable a man Rabin was, about his sincere efforts to improve the state of Israel and life for the Jewish people, and about the lessons that we must learn from his assassination.

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