

Three shots

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Three shots cracked and shattered the mood of optimism and hope at the peace rally in Tel Aviv, on the night burned in collective memory. Two of those shots killed Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The shots sent shockwaves beyond the Kings of Israel Square. They resounded through the entire State of Israel, they were felt deeply and strongly throughout the Jewish world. Those old enough to understand will no doubt remember hearing the news, and having to hear it again, because, no, it couldn't be true. And when the details came to light, when the assassin was identified, confusion, disappointment, devastation were, once again, the overriding emotions—how could it be? The elected prime minister of the State of Israel, a man whose history and achievements mirrored those of the state itself, whose efforts towards achieving peace in the Jewish state were no less brave and courageous than any military strategy—killed by an Israeli, a Jew. Incomprehensible.

The peace rally in Tel Aviv that night was organised as a counter expression to the demonstrations mounted by those on the right who were angrily, adamantly, violently against Rabin and the peace process. The campaign of dissent against the government had become personal and vitriolic, with caricatures of Rabin-as-Arafat and Rabin-as-Hitler taking it beyond any acceptable definition of political discourse. The red line between freedom of speech and blatant racist incitement had been crossed and trampled upon. A violent release, cataclysmic as it was, was almost inevitable.

There had been seismic rumblings and dangerous tremors. The fragile fault lines cracked at the moment of the three gunshots. The earthquake and aftershocks that followed saw Israeli society riven, split—the left wing and right wing at deadly and

intractable odds with each other. Such levels of hostility had not been seen since the pre-state divisions between Rabin's Palmach and Begin's Irgun. Notably, each of these leaders ultimately became prime ministers and architects of the only two peace agreements with Arab states until 2020.

After a quarter of a century, the assassination of Rabin remains more than a historical fact.

History repeats itself. History matters. Especially in Israel, a nation built on a long and deep historical connection, a country in which the exploration of archaeological layers reveals human innovation and—literally—Biblical history, a country to which Jews around the world are connected and have legal rights to return to before they've ever gone there. Yes, the history of 2500 years ago matters and so does history of 25 years ago.

Of all personalities in modern Israeli history, Rabin represents the establishment and development of the state in its first half-century. He commanded the Palmach, served as IDF chief-of-staff, as defence minister and twice as prime minister. He was a military commander, a hero of the Six Day War. Committed to the defence and security of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, as his leadership as prime minister in Operation Entebbe—in which both Israelis and Diaspora Jews were rescued from a hijacked plane in Uganda—demonstrated. Yet Rabin was also a diplomat and a statesman and no priority was higher for him than to achieve peace in his beloved Israel.

Rabin was a military hawk and a political dove—adapting and balancing his 'wings' to suit the time and the circumstance. In this day and age of allegiance to 'wings', where all too often people adhere to the simplistic 'package deal' views of either the 'left wing' or the 'right wing', we look to Rabin as a role model of the opposite. A man of paradox, perhaps. Or rather, a man of principle, whose priority was the outcome rather than the doctrine. A man

who looked at the world through more complex lenses of morality, tolerance and humanity, rather than through the myopic view from either extreme. In the increasingly complex world in which we live, such lessons from history are ever more relevant.

Twenty-five years on, we're witnessing paradox once again. Importantly, in September this year, the Abraham Accords peace agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have been the greatest tribute to the legacy of the peace of Rabin.

Since 1995, we've seen remarkable initiatives emerge to bridge the divides in Israeli society. Organisations established by the modern Orthodox, such as Tzohar, eschewing the extremism of the murderer and his ideological associates and working across the religious and political spectra to foster tolerance, inclusion and understanding. Organisations such as Omer Bar-Lev's Acharei—an organisation designed to empower marginalised Jewish youth, educating them in democracy—a tribute to Rabin and a tangible outcome of his legacy.

Whether such initiatives, the goodwill of good people and, of course, time had made headway in the healing of the rifts is, sadly, somewhat moot today. The divisions we are observing in Israeli society today are as marked as they were in 1995: once again, Israeli society is teetering on what seem to be fragile fault lines. Unity, strength and tolerance are challenged by strident, political game-playing and hurling blame across society's sectors. The vision of peace, of tolerance is not one just for Israel's external borders, but remains a challenge internally.

Honouring the legacy of Rabin is the responsibility of us all. The importance of tolerance, of understanding, of peace which he taught by example are lessons of history for us at the individual, communal and national levels.