Remembering Rabin
Australian reflections on the 25th anniversary of his assassination
Remembering Rabin

Australian reflections on the 25th anniversary of his assassination

Edited by Bren Carlill
Remembering Rabin
Australian reflections on the 25th anniversary of his assassination

Selection and editorial content © Zionist Federation of Australia 2020
Individual chapters © their respective contributors 2020
Published in Melbourne, Australia by Zionist Federation of Australia,
306 Hawthorn Rd, Caulfield South Vic 3162

This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License
(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).
You may share all or parts of this work with attribution, but you may not
change any part of it, or use any part of it for commercial reasons.
License available at
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode

Front cover designed by Shlomo Rosinger (www.rosinger.com.au)
Typesetting and design by Toby Levy
Printed by Weis Printing
Foreword

Yitzhak Rabin is a giant figure in the history of the Jewish nation, Israel and in the history of our time. The present book commemorates the legacy of one of Israel’s finest children; a soldier and commander in war, and a soldier and leader for peace. To many of us, Rabin symbolised the Israeli ideal and typified the fundamental tenets of our nation.

Born in Jerusalem in 1922 to a pioneering Zionist family, he attended the famous Kadoorie Agricultural High School in the idyllic Biblical surrounds of Mount Tabor and the Lower Galilee, witnessing the historic revival of the Jewish nation in its homeland after a 2000-year interregnum. The Kadoorie Agricultural School forged many of Israel’s future leaders. Like almost all of his generation, he enlisted in the IDF and fought for the survival of the newly-born State of Israel in the 1948 War of Independence, attaining the rank of colonel at the age of 26 and leading the Har-El Brigade that kept open the vital communication lines between Jerusalem on the top of the Judean mountains and the rest of the newborn state. He continued to serve in the IDF as a high-ranking commander through the 1950s and ‘60s. His leadership as the IDF’s chief-of-staff during the victory in the Six Day War earned him global admiration.

Yet, being a first-class general was merely one aspect of Rabin’s character and skillset. Alongside his military record and achievements, he was an eminent statesman. Continuing the legacy of the founder of Israel, David Ben Gurion, he embarked on the road to peace, working towards a solution to the longstanding Israeli–Palestinian conflict assisted by Foreign Minister (later Prime Minister and President) Shimon Peres, ultimately signing the first Oslo agreement on the lawn of the White House on 13 September 1993. The signing of the peace
accord with the Kingdom of Jordan in 1994 and the 1995 Interim Agreement, signed with the Palestinians, followed.

Rabin did not arrive at the Oslo process inexperienced. A lifelong stalwart of the Israel Labour Party, he was an exemplary diplomat and political leader, serving as Israel’s ambassador to the United States (1968–73) before entering the Knesset in 1973 and becoming labour minister under Prime Minister Golda Meir. During his first term as prime minister (1974–77), he brokered with Egypt the Sinai Interim Agreement that opened the door to the Camp David Accords later in the decade. Following his resignation in 1977, he returned to government as defence minister in 1984, and resumed the prime ministership in 1992.

For his commitment to peace, he made the ultimate sacrifice, being shot in November 1995 by one of his own countrymen. Nonetheless, his enormous efforts are also reflected in the spirit of the recent Abraham Accords, which normalised relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and publicly endorsed cooperation, stability, and peace in the region with the Arab and Muslim states at large.

Yitzhak Rabin’s name is carved into the history of our nation. His legacy combines the two ultimate desires of the Jewish nation and of Israel; to live in security and to reach peace with its neighbours. His vision is alive.

Ambassador Dr Tibor Shalev-Schlosser
Chargé D’Affaires, Israel Embassy, Canberra
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Bren Carlill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodiment of the Israeli story</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbi James Kennard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The last liberated prime minister of Israel</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greer Fay Cashman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The silent majority must not be silent</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Leibler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabin’s legacy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs of peace</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Gian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A changed course</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rinat Kedem Bart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A foundation</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Chrapot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shir Leshalom</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Lacey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabin and the youth</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael Grunseit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope and responsibility</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Manhaim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Israeli assembly</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noa Shaul</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Song for Peace</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sapir Atias</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A legacy undiminished by tragedy</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jillian Segal AO and Alex Ryvchin</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man of honour</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mark Leibler AC</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Washington memoir</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sam Lipski AO</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man of peace and Jewish peoplehood</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prof David Mittelberg</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The genesis of a tragedy</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dr Rachael Kohn AO</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This is what Rabin would have wanted”</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dr Ran Porat</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rabin oration</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Omer Bar-Lev</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One desert, two communities of women</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hagar Baram</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rethinking my Zionism</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simone Szalmuk-Singer</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three shots</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ginette Searle</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the authors</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Bren Carlill

After Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination 25 years ago, then-Prime Minister Paul Keating told the Australian Parliament, “Yitzhak Rabin’s life was a life that mattered. He changed, fundamentally and for the better, the society he led and the region of which Israel is part.”

Mr Keating was right. Rabin did matter. He was a giant in Israel’s early defence and its triumph in the Six Day War. He was instrumental in shaping the relationship between his country and the United States, and he was Israel’s first Israeli-born prime minister. Rabin was also the personal and political representation of the many Israelis who realised that, for Israel to truly live in peace, a negotiated mutual compromise with the Palestinians was a requirement.

The Oslo peace process, begun during his second prime ministership, has not brought the peace originally hoped for. Many have argued that, had Rabin not been killed just six weeks after the Interim Agreement was signed, a different—a better—outcome would have been the result. This book was not created to enter into that debate. Rather, it looks at the impact that Rabin’s life, legacy and, yes, death had on individual Australians or Israelis with a strong connection to Australia and, through them, the wider Australian Jewish community.

As Mr Keating also said to Parliament,

His assassin has done more than rob us all of the life and potential of Yitzhak Rabin. He has cheated the Jewish people of the security of the beliefs to which so many Israelis had dedicated themselves. That Israel was a place where, above all else, human rights and human happiness were the foundation of the society.
The fact that an Israeli Jew murdered the Israeli prime minister was—and remains—deeply unsettling. In his contribution to this book, Jeremy Leibler, a religious Zionist, recalls his shock upon discovering that it was a religious Zionist that killed Rabin. Jeremy writes that the lesson of Rabin’s death is a clarion call to the ‘silent majority’. All examples of extremism, whether left or right, whether religious or secular, must be called out and condemned. “Extremism is seductive”, he writes, “yet it only ever leads to death and destruction. The silent majority must not be silent”.

In a searingly personal account, Simone Szalmuk-Singer writes how the extremism of Rabin’s assassination—when “the principles of democracy were deposed by the gun”—caused her to question her own Zionism, and even walk away from long-held plans to make aliyah. Simone is today deeply connected to Israel and to the Australian Jewish–Israel relationship. But her Zionism is more nuanced and less naïve as a result of Rabin’s murder.

This more innocent, even naïve, Israel before the assassination is a theme that comes up again and again, such as in Greer Fay Cashman’s reminisce about the near-total lack of security infrastructure before Rabin’s assassination, in the street she shares with Israel’s prime ministers. And in Ran Porat’s examination of the evolution of how Israeli comedians have dealt with Rabin’s murder over the years.

In his speech to Parliament, Mr Keating reflected on a conversation he’d had with Shimon Peres:

*When I met Prime Minister Peres after the funeral, he told me that in the 50 years he had known Mr Rabin, he had never seen him as happy as he was on the night he was killed. He was buoyed by the support of the vast crowd of 100,000 which had turned out to rally for the cause of peace. For the first time in his life, he had sung in public.*
The song Rabin sang was Shir Leshalom—Song for Peace—a common theme of this book’s contributors, who are drawn to the tragic irony that it was at a peace rally where Rabin was murdered. That a blood-stained page with the lyrics to the Song for Peace was pulled from his shirt pocket.

Emily Gian, in particular, writes in detail about Shir Leshalom, as well as Livkot Lecha, another song that became a kind of anthem for the slain prime minister.

Ginette Searle writes about the initiatives established because of Rabin’s assassination, like Tzohar, which aims to bridge the secular–religious divide in Israel. Another organisation founded as a result of Rabin’s murder is Acharei. Its founder Omer Bar-Lev was invited to deliver the Zionist Federation of Australia’s Rabin Oration on 29 October this year. The oration is included in this book.

Of course, as Sam Lipski—who knew Rabin—writes in the book’s ‘keynote’ chapter, Rabin should not only be remembered for his last three years, but by his 50 years of service to Zionism and the State of Israel. Sam writes in detail about a key, if under-appreciated, chapter of Rabin’s life; his time as Israeli ambassador to the US.

Long-time Australian Jewish community leader Mark Leibler also comments on the life of Rabin—a man he counted as his friend—as he recalls the honour behind Rabin’s heavy decisions. Rabin certainly was a man of honour. His political character wasn’t a façade; it was his authentic self. In 1977, a survivable political scandal saw him resign from his first term as prime minister—not because he had to, but because he thought it was the right thing to do.

He became prime minister again in 1992 with a clear political vision; to make peace with Israel’s enemies. This wasn’t a transitory vision driven by the political winds, but the strategy of a leader determined to make difficult choices for the future of his country. Rabin wasn’t
swayed by bad polls. He remained resolute. What was controversial then is widely accepted now—a negotiated peace based on mutual recognition. But it was Rabin that brought this to the mainstream. Rabin didn’t just sign agreements with Israel’s enemies. He beseeched them to become partners. On the White House lawn, he said to all Palestinians,

_We are destined to live together on the same soil, in the same land... Enough of blood and tears. Enough... We, like you, are people. People who want to build a home, to plant a tree, to love, to live side-by-side with you in dignity, in empathy, as human beings, as free men._

This book also includes reflections on Rabin’s contributions and legacy by other senior figures in the Australian Jewish community, such as Jillian Segal and Mark Dreyfus. And it includes young members of the community. The Australian Jewish community is justly proud of the strength of its youth movements. This book includes reflections by two Australians currently active in them, plus two Israelis who are in Australia as shlichim, and a whole host of others who were involved in the youth movements—some only recently, others at the time of Rabin’s murder. Similar to Yael Grunseit, who recalls Rabin’s entreaty to Israel’s youth to change things for the better, our contributors reflect on how they have internalised the example of Rabin and the lessons of his death to improve their lives and that of those around them.

The book also contains reflections on the assassin’s extremism, and the fruits of Israeli–Jordanian peace in the Arava.

This book was created and collated in the Australian spring of 2020, a difficult year across the globe, as COVID-19 challenged our societies and ravished our economies. Alongside the public health crisis, in Israel a crisis of confidence has taken hold among large parts of the public. Faith in the governing elite has crumbled, and demonstrations are held week after week, calling for the resignation...
of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the light of his indictment on corruption charges.

Despite these tensions and despite the deep divisions that are picking at the seams of Israeli society, so many of our contributors note that the lessons of Rabin remain well remembered. The youth—not even born when Rabin was killed—are key to keeping the fabric of Israeli society from becoming too tattered. Numerous of our contributors recall the ‘Israeli Assembly’ that happens each year in Rabin Square on the anniversary of Rabin’s murder. Youth from all the youth movements—secular and religious, left and right—gather to discuss their country and their society. Not to fight, not to shout, but to share perspectives and learn from each other.

By any measure, youth provide the best indication of the future of any society. Israel's youth, like youth around the world, are eager to move into the future, but they also have an eye on the past. Rabin’s life provides them examples of how to live, and his death a lesson on what can go wrong when extremism is allowed to flourish, and when the middle ground is left vacant or silent.

Ultimately, Rabin’s legacy is the inspiration provided by his example. A leader, driven by honour, love of country and a determination—through thick and thin—to do the right thing. A man who fought his enemies when he had to, but who also sought to turn those enemies into partners, and who inspired others to practice, not merely preach, that kind of behaviour. The entire world would be well served with more leaders like Rabin.
Embodiment of the Israeli story

James Kennard

The story of modern Israel is composed of many strands. The flourishing of Jewish culture, the physical reclamation of the land, a renaissance of Jewish learning, and a new type of political leadership are but some. Overshadowing them all is the spectre of war and the hope for peace.

No one individual could personally embody the weaving together of all of these strands, and Yitzhak Rabin did not. Yet his life collected far more facets of the epic saga that is Zionism than most people merited. Tragically, his death, too, is part of that story.

His parents tell the story of the third aliyah: Nehemiah, from the Ukraine via the United States, and Rosa, from a religious anti-Zionist family in Belarus. Motivated by a passion for the Zionist cause—and understanding that aliyah was an integral part of that belief—they each moved to Israel and met in Jerusalem. Rabin was a sabra, born to immigrant parents, a child of the Jewish revolution.

As a teenager, his inclination and training again encapsulated two vital components of the modern Zionist narrative; agriculture and military defence. The needs of the hour obliged him to prioritise the latter and, in 1941, Rabin joined the Palmach, where his intellect and skill ensured a swift rise through the ranks.

Rabin’s military heroism and achievements, reaching their zenith in the lightning victories of the Six Day War as chief-of-staff, tell us of the ever-present burden of military or other national service that falls on the Israeli population.
Precisely because of the vital importance of the army and its leadership, Israeli politics has often offered a swift entry to retiring generals. And so it was with Rabin, whose meteoric rise led him to being ambassador, minister and prime minister within six years of leaving the IDF.

Since the birth of the Zionist movement, modern Jewish history has seen a new type of leadership. No longer dependent on those with good connections to non-Jewish governments, like the Diaspora Jewish leaders of old, the modern version of Jewish leadership—that is, prime ministers of Israel—have had to be models of resilience, strength and connection with their public. Politics in Israel is brutal; Rabin’s rivalry with Shimon Peres dominated both their careers for three decades. His fall from grace in 1977 (even for a misdemeanour that seems trivial by today’s standards) sadly set a precedent that has been seen again amongst more recent members of the top echelon.

Rabin’s first term as prime minister is best remembered for his courage in authorising the Entebbe raid in 1976. With the hindsight of that remarkable victory, it is hard to recall the great risk of failure, and hence the great challenge of allowing it to proceed. Such life-and-death decisions, on such a scale, are rarely demanded of other world leaders, but are inevitable for prime ministers of Israel.

His second term saw significant economic and social reforms, but is best remembered for the signing of the Oslo accords. Although some wax lyrical about Rabin’s ‘conversion’ from warrior to peacemaker, I believe that his stance remained consistent—a realist. When war was, regrettably, the necessary path, that was the one he took. Similarly, when it became necessary to recognise the PLO and shake the hand of Israel’s erstwhile enemy, that too was his direction. Both roads were trodden with precisely the same reluctance and the same realism. Rabin was never a starry-eyed dreamer. His vision of peace was deliberately constrained and restrained. We can only wonder whether, if he had lived, the Oslo process would have delivered the effective peace that he believed it would.
Rabin’s life tells us little about Judaism’s contribution to the Zionist movement. He was described by Dennis Ross as “the most secular Jew (he) had met in Israel”. However, Rabin’s sense of responsibility for Jews and the Jewish people was immense. Nor does Rabin's life shed light on the creation of a modern Jewish culture in Israel, but it does bear witness to the struggles of the early pioneers, the need for a strong defence and each individual's sacrifice for that cause, as well as the demands of leadership.

And there is one more element of Rabin’s life that tells a tale of modern Israel, the saddest chapter of all.

Jews have been famous for their disagreement for millennia, but with the restoration of Jewish independence, such arguments now have both the opportunity and the scope to create deep fissures in the fabric of Israeli society. An electoral system that rewards highlighting the needs of one’s own community and camp over seeking consensus has added to the deep polarisation between Jew and Arab, between Ashkenazi and Sephardi, between rich and poor and, especially, between left and right.

When the Oslo accords were seen by some as existential catastrophe and by others as long-awaited salvation; when unscrupulous politicians exploited and expanded such divisions, we now know that violence was inevitable.

It would be heartening to say that the legacy of the assassination was a check on this fragmentation and a healing of the breach. Alas, after a few months of reconciliation, the intervening years have seen yet more division and distrust.

As we remember Rabin, a quarter-century after his killing, we remember an Israeli leader, a Jewish hero, whose determination, bravery and realistic vision led his people to great triumphs, despite mistakes and pitfalls along the way.
But as we tell Rabin’s story, we tell the story of a people, who re-entered history as a nation after millennia of waiting; who made the desert bloom and the army strong; who fought wars and hoped for an end to war; who acted as a country that was young, yet ancient. This was the story of Yitzhak Rabin. This was the story of the Jewish people in our time.
Yitzhak Rabin was the last liberated prime minister of Israel, one who could casually go out into the street without a bodyguard hovering at his shoulder. How do I know? For 47 years, I have lived in the same street as the prime ministers of Israel—three buildings from the prime minister’s residence. I can remember how Rabin used to saunter out of the house casually hanging on to the collar of his suit jacket, which was flung over his shoulder.

His official car was waiting for him in the street, and there was no need to stop traffic to let it pass, even though the mood in Israel was hostile for weeks before and after the signing of the Oslo accords. Benjamin Netanyahu, who does not come out into the street, has a motorcade of at least seven vehicles to fool any would-be assassin.

This was Rabin’s second stint as prime minister. In many respects, it had been easier the first time around. There had been an exultation in the fact that he was the first sabra prime minister. More than that, he was born in Jerusalem, had fought in the War of Independence and had been the IDF’s chief-of-staff during the Six Day War, which led to the reunification of Jerusalem.

There were tough issues to resolve, but there was nothing quite as controversial as the agreement with the Palestinians.

During his second stint, 15 years later, the euphoria was gone, but no one envisaged a situation such as the one that exists today. The rifts currently making Israeli society so divisive had already begun to set in but, at the time, the issue was one of existential threat versus the first steps to a hoped-for peace in the region. The hatred, which has become so pervasive in Israeli politics, was still a long way into the future.
The prime example of the difference between then and now is the area surrounding the prime minister’s residence, which is located on the intersection of Smolenskin and Balfour Streets on the seam of the Rehavia and Talbiya neighbourhoods. The entrance is in Smolenskin Street.

During Rabin’s administration, the fence was low, with a slightly higher wrought iron gate. There was a large glass panel in the front door, which was visible from the street and, when important meetings took place in the house, journalists standing directly opposite in the narrow street could see by the shadows on the glass that the meeting had come to an end.

Today, half of each of the two intersecting streets are sealed off. No one, other than residents or people with special permission, is allowed into the sealed area.

The high fence built around the house has been fitted with tall, heavy metal doors. There is a proliferation of streetlamps, each of which is enhanced by hidden cameras.

Barriers have been erected on the footpath surrounding the house.

Demonstrations take place in a parallel street.

Recently, I was given a ride home by a former member of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s staff. She could not believe the extent to which security had been upgraded since Olmert’s day, and commented that it looks just like Fort Knox.

●

In April 1993, Prime Minister Rabin and his wife Leah travelled to Poland to participate in the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.
Most of the passengers in the plane from were Holocaust survivors, with the majority originally from Warsaw. Among them was Shmuel Gogol, who had been a child in the orphanage run by Janusz Korczak. A believer in education through incentive, Korczak used to reward the children with small gifts when they had done something special. Gogol was given a harmonica, which he played very well. Gogol, who was already in his late teens during the Nazi occupation, left the orphanage, but was captured and deported to Auschwitz. A Nazi with an appreciation for music heard him playing the harmonica, and forced him to join the Auschwitz Orchestra. On one occasion, whilst playing, he saw members of his own family being led to the gas chambers. From that time on, he played with his eyes closed.

In the plane, Rabin greeted Gogol and every other passenger personally. Auschwitz was included in Rabin’s itinerary in Poland and, in deference to his status, Israel’s national anthem was played. I happened to be among the journalists included in Rabin’s entourage and, purely by chance, was standing near him and his wife as Shmuel Gogol, once a member of the Auschwitz Orchestra, stood as a proud Israeli and played Hatikva. Rabin turned to his wife and said: “Sing loud, Leah. In this place you have to sing Hatikva louder than ever.”

In his address, Rabin said that every handful of soil there was drenched in the blood of those who had been murdered. Fifty years later, their cries could still be heard ringing in the ears of the Jewish people who, despite persecution and oppression, had risen from the dust of the victims and established a nation of people of moral fibre, of culture and spirit and military strength.

Shmuel Gogol, who had established a children’s harmonica orchestra in Israel, died a month after playing Hatikva in Auschwitz, content that Yitzhak Rabin had given him a glorious moment of revenge.
On the night of 4 November 1995, minutes before Rabin was assassinated, I was on the very steps from which Rabin descended to his car in the aftermath of a peace rally. Not wanting to get caught in the rush of the huge crowd as it left, I had sought to make a quick exit and headed for the bus that brought me and some 50 others from Jerusalem. It was only when we were in the bus and travelling on the Tel Aviv–Jerusalem highway that we had any inkling of what had happened. There were conflicting reports on the radio about blank bullets, about the prime minister being shot and rushed to hospital, about the road to the hospital being blocked, and then the tragic announcement by Rabin’s bureau chief, Eitan Haber, that the prime minister was dead. To most of the passengers in the bus, the catastrophe was akin to losing a member of their own family. Men and women began to cry and to scream from the depths of their souls in that universal trauma mode of people in shock giving way to primeval emotions.

The weeping continued all the way to Jerusalem.

On 6 November, Rabin’s flag-covered coffin was brought to the forecourt of the Knesset to lie in state prior to the funeral. Thousands of people lined up to pay their last respects. Even elderly people walked the long distance from the main road to give a hero of Israel the honour due to him.

Hundreds of world leaders came to the funeral where, in addition to eulogies delivered by Rabin’s granddaughter, and the two men closest to him, Eitan Haber and Shimon Sheves, memorial tributes were voiced by US President Bill Clinton and Jordan’s King Hussein.
Earlier in the day, Hussein and his wife Nur came to the prime minister’s residence to personally convey their condolences to Leah Rabin, who received them with enormous grace, considering the circumstances. Security was still casual. The shock had not registered sufficiently, and so the neighbour from three doors away, who happened to also carry a press card, wandered in after the king and queen. No-one tried to stop her.

Rabin had enjoyed a special relationship with King Hussein, which, to some extent, may have been cemented by the fact that they were both heavy smokers. The king found it difficult to resist a cigarette, even in the process of a condolence call. “Do you mind if I smoke?” he asked Leah. “Not at all”, she replied.

Perhaps the smoke that wafted into the air was a faint source of comfort in the depths of her sorrow.
The silent majority must not be silent

Jeremy Leibler

The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, now a quarter of a century ago, had a profound impact on Jews and non-Jews all over the world. The shock and horror of the news, when it broke, made it one of those moments forever etched in our individual and collective psyches, permanently engraved on our historical memories.

I remember the day vividly. In the early hours of a Sunday morning, the phone rang, waking up the house. It was an Australian journalist seeking a comment from my father about the assassination of the Israeli prime minister by a Jewish Israeli.

I was an idealistic 15-year-old religious Zionist, a passionate member of Bnei Akiva, a religious Zionist youth movement and a student at Leibler Yavneh College, a religious Zionist school. To be told that the sitting Israeli prime minister had been assassinated—not by terrorists, but by a fellow religious Zionist Jew—brought my world crashing down.

I couldn’t absorb how this man, this murderer, had contrived—and fully embraced—a religious justification for such extreme and fanatically evil action. Yigal Amir was one of us and had been brought up in a tradition that was not dissimilar to mine.

The perspective I held at the time regarding the Oslo accords was irrelevant. I had watched Rabin shake hands with Yasser Arafat, an arch terrorist, with some trepidation. But I shared Israel’s excitement about the prospect of a new peace for the region and I admired Rabin’s courage and commitment to deliver a better future for both Israelis and Palestinians.
For myself, like many people in Israel and Australia, I took a certain level of political stability for granted. Sure, we fought, we disagreed, we argued. We were Jewish, after all. But there was a limit. ‘Yesh gvul’, as they say in Israel. Political assassinations and murder, that was over the limit and beyond the pale. That kind of thing happened in other communities, to other peoples and other nations. After 2000 years of unrelenting persecution, the Jewish people had learnt that, no matter what, human life was sacred. Inviolable. Yet here we were. Like any tinpot regime where political differences are settled not with argument and debate, but with violence.

In simple terms, religious Zionism can be defined as a form of Zionism that believes that Jewish autonomy in the land of Israel has religious, not just political significance. Religious Zionists believe in the Torah, in the eternal and sacred values of the Jewish people but also in the values of the modern world. Science and literature, technology and culture. My family’s religious Zionism involved a passionate commitment to our religious values, our Zionist values and our participation in the broader culture simultaneously. None of it was contradictory. It all meshed together.

The ideology and the movement that I had thought I was a part of was one built on integration. Not weak and effete compromises, but on a sturdy and confident form of integration of complementary values. An approach that saw commitment to the Torah and commitment to Zionism as complementary and not contradictory. An approach that saw adherence to ancient values and the embrace of modern institutions not as discord but as harmony. Our heroes were Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik, titans of Torah who simultaneously embraced the secular Zionist movement and the teachings of modernity.

Yet, over in Israel, a very different religious Zionism had been fomenting within the broader religious Zionist camp. One that was not built on compromise and harmony but, rather, on something far more radical and extreme. We know that while Yigal Amir pulled
the trigger that ultimately killed the prime minister, this heinous act was not committed in a vacuum. Some rabbis could not resist the temptation of mixing religion and politics and, in doing so, created an atmosphere of hatred and incitement. Few of these leaders called directly for an assassination, but there were many whose rhetoric could be said to have created an atmosphere that allowed—or even prompted—Amir to pull the trigger. Signs dotted the country denouncing Rabin as a traitor. Others depicted him dressed in an SS uniform. Biblical laws and Talmudic interpretations were invoked that made the case not only for the removal of the prime minister, but for his murder.

While the religious Zionist rabbis and the leaders who incited the violence were certainly in the minority within the religious Zionist camp, there were others, both religious and lay leaders, who were vehemently against incitement and murder. Yet their views, by and large, remained unknown to the wider public. Because, at that time, they committed a cardinal sin. They remained silent.

We often talk of a silent majority. There is an urban myth in political circles that while the extremes of both the right and the left are the most vocal, there is a moderate centre that dwarfs both of these extremes.

With the idealism of my 15-year-old self and the resolve of my 40-year-old self, my message is that it is incumbent on all of us—the ‘silent majority’—to abandon our silence; to actively, determinedly call out extremism in any form from any source.

Whether from the left or the right, whether it’s antisemitism, racism, Islamophobia or homophobia.

Whether we’re sitting around the Shabbat table, the university quadrangle or the yeshiva study hall. We must challenge extremism that describes a political leader with a differing view as a ‘traitor’ or separates the world into those ‘for us’ and those ‘against us’.
As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks says, “when you mix religion and politics, you get terrible politics and even worse religion”. This disease is not unique to the right or the left. Sadly, today it permeates both world views.

Engagement outside of our comfort zones, and respectful, nuanced debate is the only path to a better place for our troubled world.

Recently, new Knesset member Tehila Friedman of the Blue-White party and proud religious Zionist, made a stunning first speech to the Knesset that went viral in both Israel and the Diaspora. Directly attacking this winner-takes-all culture, she departed from the convention of using her first address as an acceptance speech, instead laying out a strong and compelling case for a new and assertive centrism. “My centre is a pre-existing centre, a fervent centre, that is unwilling to compromise on its centrism, on its responsibility for all the residents of the country.”

It is this kind of assertive centrism that must become the most vocal voice in our communities, and hence in our politics. A belief that is proud of compromise and finding a middle path. It is this kind of assertive centrism that led the Zionist Federation of Australia to condemn the merger of the Jewish Home party with the Kahanist Otzma party prior to the last Israeli election. It is this same assertive centrism that guides leaders like Rabbi David Stav to use compassion and sensitivity as a guide in deciding issues of Jewish law.

Extremism is seductive. Yet it only ever leads to destruction and chaos. Twenty-five years after the tragedy of Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, we, the silent majority, must be silent no longer.
Rabin’s legacy

Mark Dreyfus

Yitzhak Rabin was one of Israel’s greatest prime ministers. But not only that, Rabin’s courage and integrity in that role makes him stand out as one of the great global leaders of the past generation.

In today’s world in particular, Rabin’s legacy of leadership is clear. During his time as prime minister, Rabin provided a compelling example of what national leadership looks like when the role is embraced by a person of courage, integrity and a commitment to face the unvarnished truth of the challenges before them. In all these matters, Rabin demonstrated a leadership that is the polar opposite of the woeful example provided by the populist rulers of so many nations today.

As a member of the Australian Labor Party, I have always felt an affinity with the political and trade union wings of the labour movement in Israel, which have been integral to Israel’s foundation and later successes as a state. The Israeli Labour Party’s past leaders include not only Rabin, but also Prime Ministers Golda Meir, Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak.

Rabin knew what it was to fight for his country. As a young man, he fought for the Palmach in the years leading up to the establishment of modern Israel. And then he fought on as a member of the Israel Defence Force, rapidly rising through the ranks until finally serving as IDF chief-of-staff during Israel’s greatest military victory—the 1967 war.

Yet, the same man who helped Israel take the occupied territories also understood that they would need to be relinquished in the interests of peace. In 1993, in the context of the Oslo peace process, Rabin had the courage to tell his former enemies in the PLO, as well as the nation that elected him to lead them:
We, the soldiers who have returned from battle stained with blood, we who have seen our relatives and friends killed before our eyes, we who have attended their funerals and cannot look into the eyes of their parents, we who have come from a land where parents bury their children, we who have fought against you, the Palestinians, we say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough.

Rabin’s leadership, as a courageous soldier for both war and then for peace, was recognised around the world. His role as a peacemaker was acknowledged with the Nobel Peace Prize, which he was awarded in 1994. It also formed the foundation of the deep friendship he forged with US President Bill Clinton, as they took the bold actions they understood would be necessary if Israel and the Palestinians were to bring an end to their long history of blood and tears.

We cannot know what Israel would look like today if Rabin had lived on to lead his country toward peace. As so many of us still remember hearing the news of 25 years ago, Rabin’s leadership was ended, not by the democratic choice of the people of Israel, but by murder. Israel’s prime minister, a man who had fought for his nation for his entire adult life, was not cut down by the bullets of his enemies on the battlefield, or by a Palestinian terrorist’s bomb. Rather, he was murdered by a right-wing Jewish extremist, driven by radical religious doctrines that placed mystical territorial aspirations above respect for life, above the opportunities of peace, and above the Zionist vision of a democratic and independent State of Israel.
Rabin’s legacy seems even clearer today than it did at the time of his murder. One of his great strengths was his willingness to face the truth of the world, and of the challenges it posed for Israel. It wasn’t that he didn’t want a larger Israel incorporating all the lands mentioned in the Torah. Rabin had the courage to face the reality that another nation, the Palestinians, held a yearning for those same lands, and not only that, that justice required their claim to be accommodated. To tell his nation that painful compromise was necessary, including the Israeli settlers whose ties to those territories were both genuine and deep, required true courage. It required a willingness to lead, rather than follow.

Today, we see far too many leaders in the world who spend their time listening to the versions of reality presented by their spin doctors and by vested interests looking to further their profits, rather than by the experts trying to present the plain truth of the challenges we face. Too many leaders seem interested primarily in what they see as the game of politics, and spend their time working with their political strategists and focus groups on the best way to maintain their hold on power, rather than the best way to serve the national—and, I would hope, in our increasingly interconnected world—the global interest.

To lead a nation is an immensely difficult task. It requires the courage to truly lead. It requires the integrity to face the reality of the world as it is, rather than as one wishes it to be, and to do what needs to be done in response. Leadership also requires compassion, and the humility to admit mistakes, and to boldly set out in a new direction if that is what the national interest demands.

Yitzhak Rabin demonstrated all of these qualities of leadership. It is my hope that Rabin’s legacy will continue to inspire current and future leaders around the world to also embrace those qualities, and the example of courageous leadership with which he provides us.
Songs of Peace

Emily Gian

It was one of those moments in history. Anyone of a certain age with any interest in Israel remembers where they were when they heard the news that Yitzhak Rabin had been assassinated.

I was only 12, and do not remember much about the morning the news filtered through here in Australia. But collective memory is powerful and, over the years, I have assembled snippets of memory from this tumultuous time in Jewish history.

I remember the funeral, televised across the globe, and to the sense of affinity I felt with Rabin’s freckle-faced granddaughter, Noa, and her eloquent, heartfelt eulogy to the slain prime minister. She was not that much older than me, but she spoke bravely and courageously about her grandfather, her pillar of fire.

I remember feeling the sense of history in hearing King Hussein of Jordan, from “the opposite side of the historic divide” speaking so warmly of his “brother” in peace. And, famously, the words of US President Bill Clinton, ending with those two wonderful words of brotherhood, “shalom, chaver”.

It’s a question that I still can’t answer. Am I really recalling his funeral or is it that, after viewing so many replays over the passage of the years, I have convinced myself that I really watched it in real time? The question fades when I reflect on the importance of the moment.

Thanks to the global media networks, the entire world was able to pay respect to a heroic figure, who transformed from a man of war to a man who was passionate and sincere in his support of peace. Rabin had shown this many times since his September 1993 handshake with Yasser Arafat on the lawns of the White House. He concluded his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech by saying,
“there is only one radical means of sanctifying human lives. Not armoured plating, or tanks, or planes, or concrete fortifications. The one radical solution is peace."

That message was repeated in the speech he gave at the peace rally that preceded the assassination in the Tel Aviv square that now bears his name. The vision from that night remains: not only the speech-making, but also the peace songs, the final, joyous moments of solidarity on that fateful night, the announcement on the Israeli news from correspondent Aharon Barnea that Rabin had not survived the attack but had passed away in hospital, followed by the outpouring of the grief, chaos and confusion of the time.

The clearest memories I carry in my mind are those of the music that became synonymous with Rabin. Many of those songs swirl in the memory but there are two that stand out: Shir Leshalom—Song of Peace—and Livkot Lecha—To Cry for You.

Shir Leshalom was controversial when first written in 1969, only two years after the Six Day War and with the Yom Kippur War still four years away. The song initially received a frosty reception from Israel’s senior military figures. However, on the night of 4 November 1995, Rabin, his fellow Nobel Peace Laureate Shimon Peres and Israeli folk singer Miri Aloni concluded the rally by singing Shir Leshalom, along with the tens of thousands in attendance. In that one place were gathered the nation’s generations—old, middle-aged, teenagers and the very young—singing a hymn for peace.

But sadly, not every person there agreed with his message. As he was leaving the rally, Rabin was murdered. The lyrics to Shir Leshalom were later found on a bloodstained sheet of paper in his shirt pocket. Surely, a metaphor for the entire peace process?

Twenty-five years have passed and we are further away from peace than ever before but, whenever I hear the song, I feel my heart
swelling, as if the optimism of the early ’90s, when peace seemed possible, returns.

*Lift your eyes with hope
Not through the rifles’ sights
Sing a song for love
And not for wars
Don’t say the day will come
Bring on that day
Because it is not a dream
And in all the city squares
Cheer only for peace!

Aviv Geffen is an extremely popular figure among Israeli youth for his post-punk, experimental rock music. He wrote Livkot Lecha in memory of a friend who died in a car accident a few years earlier, and sang it onstage during the peace rally. Ever since, the words of the song have taken on a whole new meaning as a prophesy of the tragic assassination that took place later that night.

*I am going to cry for you, be strong up there
My longings are like doors opened at night.

*Forever, my brother, I will always remember you
And at the end we will meet, you know,
I have other friends but they too fade away
Against your unbelievable light.

Livkot Lecha became an anthem for Rabin. Geffen sang it in the very same place a week after the assassination and it came to symbolise the ‘Candle Youth’, who mourned Rabin by lighting memorial candles. It does not matter where I am or what I am doing, whenever I hear it, the song stirs within me a real sense of nostalgia—almost a longing—for this sad period when the nation lost its peacemaker and was, for a short time, united in grief.
The songs of the era speak to the impact that Rabin had on my life and the lives of my generation. They demonstrated Rabin’s example of achieving peace between people who were once enemies. During my student days at the University of Melbourne in the early 2000s, despite the second intifada, I still hoped that peace with the Palestinians was attainable. I wrote hope-filled essays in Jewish studies and history about Rabin and the Oslo peace accords.

I admired the courage it took for the former soldier to extend his hand in peace to the Palestinians, his bravery in understanding that the only way to make peace with Israel’s neighbours was to find a way to meet them in a spirit of mutual recognition and compromise.

When I first began working for Zionism Victoria (then the State Zionist Council of Victoria), one of my earliest projects was to carry out background research for a briefing paper on the 2003 Sydney Peace Prize, which was about to be awarded to Hanan Ashrawi. There were many who advocated that she should not be awarded the prize. There was certainly a body of evidence, including her own words, to suggest that Ashrawi was not a woman of peace. But my real concern was that, if this prize really addressed the subject of enemies making peace, then it was disingenuous that only one side be honoured. Surely, if it was to be presented to Ashrawi, then it should also have been presented to a worthy Israeli recipient, like Amos Oz?

However, those responsible for the Sydney Peace Prize were not interested. They preferred a one-sided approach, which ultimately caused fractures in the peace discussion and ran in diametric opposition to the legacy of Rabin. Peace was about compromise and, above everything, it was about partnership. That is why Rabin, Peres and Arafat all were awarded Nobel Peace Prizes. We can argue at length about Arafat and his suitability for the award, but the agreement would not have been possible without his presence.
This is precisely why American Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s September 2020 decision to self-isolate from peace, by withdrawing from an Americans for Peace Now event to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Rabin’s assassination, is so regrettable. The message this one-sided decision leaves is one of Ocasio-Cortez’s betrayal of Israelis and Palestinians who want peace. It begs the question why someone with her lack of credentials on the subject was invited to be on the podium of a rally for peace in the first place.

Peace can only be achieved through diplomacy and mutual recognition by people who want to achieve it. Boycotts and public statements against Israel will not bring the two sides together. Instead, they will drive the parties further apart. This is, perhaps, why we see Arab states beginning to leave the Palestinians behind when they reach out to Israel to create new relationships for the future.

I might not remember with clarity the night of Rabin’s assassination, but I am forever grateful to have been able to learn about his life and his legacy. That will stay with me forever.

Lift your eyes with hope  
Not through the rifles’ sights  
Sing a song for love  
And not for wars.
Motzei Shabbat. I am watching TV, talking on the phone with my best friend, whose nickname is Cunefa. There is a special broadcast of the big rally in Kings of Israel Square and I wish I was there. Teenagers jumping in the fountain with signs of peace in their hands, artists singing songs of peace with government ministers. I continue talking with Cunefa for about an hour but, in the background, I hear the tone from the TV has changed to something dramatic. There have been shots. Rabin has been shot? Terrorists? In the peace rally? Nothing is clear, and I become fully tuned to the TV, trying to receive more information. My parents have returned home and my dad sits with me in front of the TV. The reporters look shocked themselves and we understand things are bad. Within a short while, Eitan Haber appears: “Memshelet Yisrael modia betadhemah…”—“The government of Israel announces in consternation…”

Yitzhak Rabin was shot, by a religious Jew, and is dead. I see my father crying uncontrollably, I have never seen him like this before. My father was a member of Labour for as long as I can remember. So was his father. He was a part of a group of parents that formed our school, Givat Gonen, in the values of the Labour movement. My brothers and I still joke about the fact that most of the T-shirts we wore at home were from political campaigns, local and national. Rabin was my father’s hero, his hope.

I felt that the world as I knew it had changed. Understand, for a 14-year-old teenager living in Jerusalem, reality is always complicated. I remember myself waiting one morning for a local bus to school that never came, later to learn a bomb in it had detonated a few stops before mine. But there was a feeling of hope. My first activity in Habonim Dror Adelaide, while my family were on shlichut in the early ’90s, had us lying on our backs in one of
the rooms of the new shule, closing our eyes and listening to John Lennon’s Imagine. I was blown away. So far away from home, in the calmness of South Australia, I could actually imagine a world with no wars. In the years to follow, with our return to Jerusalem, there were winds of change. Peace was a vision, a purpose, and we were seeing historical agreements being made in front of our eyes.

So for us, it was a tragically painful moment for three reasons: Rabin, a leader we looked up to, is dead; a Jewish murderer killed our own leader—something we could never have believed in those days; and the fear that the path of peace was cracked. And in the Middle East, every crack can lead to decades of repairment.

For the next few days, I stay at home with my dad, watching TV, crying, and joining different assemblies. There was a constant image that wouldn’t leave me; the folded page covered with blood stains, found in his shirt pocket, with the words of Shir Leshalom, the last song of the rally that he joined singing on stage, moments before his murder. It didn’t feel appropriate to go to school that week, while the whole country was in mourning. It was a week of national mourning, starting with gatherings outside the hospital the night he was shot, followed by his casket placed outside the Knesset, the funeral—which had attendance of hundreds of world leaders—and crowded assemblies day and night outside his residence in Jerusalem and in what would soon be re-named Rabin Square. I was a part of Noar Hanerot—the Candles Youth—a term used for teenagers lighting memorial candles in different places in Israel the week of Rabin’s shiva.

Going back to routine was tough. What was to happen now? Will this moment, in a historical perspective, change the course of our nation? Politically? Socially? Morally?

Twenty-five years later and for me, this question has a clear answer. I believe that Rabin’s assassination did change the course of history. Israel today would be a different country—a better
country. Some would argue it would have been far worse, but it would definitely have been different had Yigal Amir not succeeded in his plan. In the years after the murder, the social gap between Jewish Israelis has deepened, making it almost impossible to have a conversation with someone who thinks different from yourself. We became enemies to each other, traitors, instead of siblings with a shared goal, even if the opinions vary. ‘Peace’ became a notorious word. In the last few elections, almost no political party dared to openly promote peace as a top priority. When I grew up, songs of peace were part of our culture. Today, it is rare to hear any song talking about peace. We are still a nation suffering from post-trauma, where a political murder has happened and could happen again. Unfortunately, it seems we have yet to learn from the mistakes of the past.

From a personal perspective, 4 November 1995 changed the course of my path. It was then that I decided I wanted to be an activist, to be more involved in my community, to speak up and change things for the better. Within weeks, I joined Noar Ha’avoda, a political youth movement supporting the Labour Party, and I spent the rest of my high school years organising seminars and protests, in addition to volunteering at a hotline for youth at risk. I studied law with the sole purpose of using this for social change, and have worked and volunteered at different organisations promoting social justice since then, through activism and education. I am only one representative of a generation impacted by this murder. It created a scar we all deal with differently, but it changed us all.

To remain an optimist in days like this is hard. A plague is changing the world as we know it, leading us all to live our lives in seclusion from each other. We fear that its impact on our mental health and our quality of life will remain for years. In Israel, it seems the social split is forever growing, with a national unity government that has not reunited us.
I write this during the special days for us as a Jewish nation, during the holidays of Tishrei. Days of cheshbon nefesh—self-examination—of critically exploring what we can and should do differently, on a personal and a national level. There is an opportunity in every crisis; it is about being brave enough to endorse it. In a speech embraced by millions, Tehila Friedman, a newly-appointed MK from Blue-White, called for us to stop trying to win. “We must not try to beat each other”, she said, suggesting a formation of an alliance of the moderates to build a shared centre. I believe most of us—Israelis and Jews around the world—share this belief. Despite the different opinions, we still have more in common as a nation than what separates us. Giving up the desire to force our opinions on others for an opportunity to listen and compromise is the path of peace. In the early ’90s we thought it was our enemies around us that could destroy our country. Today, we understand the real threat to our Jewish and democratic nation is the enemy within. Rabin’s vision of peace is still here. His death and the last 25 years have taught us that it is peace within ourselves that is most needed.
Mount Herzl sits on the west side of Jerusalem, next to the Jerusalem Forest. It holds the graves of Israeli prime ministers and presidents, as well as soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the country. On a winter's morning, barely one year after Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, our overcoats were buttoned up against a wind blowing cold and hard against our faces. As we stood paying homage at his grave, we listened to the words of our guide as she spoke, tears in her eyes, of his life, his achievements, his death and his legacy.

Up until that moment, our tour of the country had produced its moments of happy and sad but, mostly, our other guides had been casual and matter of fact: “this is a Roman column”; “this is the site of a Biblical event”; “a famous battle was fought here”. We were taken aback, therefore, when this young woman stood weeping at the grave of her fallen hero—the student of agriculture, a fighter in the War of Independence, who became witness to miracles. He was the general who oversaw the country’s victory in the Six Day War, the country’s first Israeli-born prime minister and, as prime minister, the man who ordered the Entebbe raid. As defence minister, he threatened to break the bones of the resistance during the first intifada, yet as prime minister for a second time, became a peacemaker with the Palestinians and, later, with Jordan. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, he ultimately lost his life at the hands of a fanatic who opposed his efforts to achieve peace.

Was our guide’s lamentation a chronicle of her nation’s loss of innocence after five decades of existence in its modern form? Were we bearing witness to the end of the age of miracles?
As we stood there with the sun finally breaking through the clouds, a sudden recollection took me back to my childhood days as a member of Melbourne’s Habonim Zionist youth movement, which is inextricably linked with Israeli Labour. We were the party of Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Shimon Peres and generals like Moshe Dayan and Rabin. This moment recalled the magical days in 1967 when the Old City was liberated, and the nation’s soldiers stood at the Wall. Two weeks after that war ended, Rabin made a speech at Hebrew University, in which he praised the sacrifice of other soldiers, those who had lost their lives—a stark reminder to the country of the harsh casualties of wars.

In the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the country was saved from potential disaster. Many regarded that as a miracle as well, but the Labour movement soon lost its way and, after almost 30 years in power, it ceded government to Menachem Begin’s Herut. Incredibly, it was the party of Israel’s right that oversaw the next miracle, when it made peace with Egypt while Labour remained more or less in the shadows until Rabin’s 1992 re-election, 15 years later.

In Australia, we woke to the news on Sunday morning in November 1995. Rabin was dead—cut down by a Jewish assassin after months of tension and incitement by those supposedly on our side but who were opposed to the peace process. Rabin had been at a peace rally at the Kings of Israel Square (now Rabin Square) in Tel Aviv. He was walking down the City Hall steps towards his car when he was hit by two bullets from a semi-automatic pistol. The speech he had just delivered was a sincere call for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The last song that came from his lips had been one of peace.

Only such a man could have brought together so many world leaders, including those from Arab countries, for a funeral. At that very place, we now stood taking in the memory of his grieving widow and children and remembering those enduring words of US
President Bill Clinton, “shalom, chaver”.

Rabin was born on 1 March 1922 in Jerusalem, one month and one day before the birth of my father Chaim in Kraskowice, Poland, a stone’s throw from the German border. In the following decades, Rabin became a commando in the Palmach and rose to its chief of operations in the War of Independence. Within that timeframe, Chaim found himself in a Nazi slave labour camp, separated from most of his family who perished in ovens. After liberation, he was married and eking out a living by moving contraband cigarettes across the Swiss border into British-occupied southern Germany.

Both men lived heroic lives in very different ways, but were connected by the miracle of survival brought about by their determination to ensure the continuation of Jewish life in the second half of the 20th century, one in our homeland, and the other in the Diaspora.

We left the graveside at Mount Herzl and moved on with the guide to our next stop, Yad Vashem. With her eulogy of Rabin fresh in my mind and aware of the place we were about to enter, I recalled the debates we had within our Zionist youth groups, and later at university, about the standard of behaviour that should be expected from the Jewish state. After all, weren’t we supposed to be “a light unto the nations”? Yet, at the same time, the nation had become embroiled in the horrors of Sabra and Shatilla in Lebanon, the occupation of land outside its recognised boundaries and the first intifada. And now, one of our number had committed a monstrous crime—the assassination of an elected leader. Wasn’t it enough that our first national poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik said our dream of Zion would be fulfilled when we produced Jewish prostitutes, Jewish thieves and a Jewish police force? Did our founders ever envisage that we could produce the Jewish assassin of a national leader, let alone one who had delivered us to the threshold of peace?
The years have rolled by and we have seen the failure of Oslo and also a second intifada, the continuation of the occupation and the failure and disbanding of peace talks with the Palestinian leadership. There is a growing list of government scandals involving the convictions and imprisonment of men in the highest offices of the land, as well as the indictment of a sitting prime minister. As an Australian, I have also experienced the frustration of witnessing from afar a legal system that produced the Malka Leifer extradition circus amid allegations the deputy health minister was criminally interfering in the case.

Recently, peace agreements with two Gulf states have coincided with more political upheaval over the country’s failure to deal with the pandemic of COVID-19. In Ha’aretz, Anshell Pfeffer remarked in September 2020 that the “much-vaunted Israeli sense of solidarity in times of war has failed it in time of plague”. We look on with horror at the dysfunctional state of the country and sometimes ask, what cavalry will come to its rescue?

There can be no doubt that the country’s pioneers achieved miracles. I cannot help but think, therefore, that it is the likes of Rabin and so many others from Israel’s earliest days, who laid the country’s rock-solid foundations. It is these that will enable the people to rise above the politics of the Saturday night demonstrations in the streets of Tel Aviv and find their way back to the heart and soul of the nation.

On one of our trips back to Israel we spent two weeks in the small moshav of Shadmot Devorah in the Lower Galilee to visit our newborn granddaughter. It was beset by financial debt and in administrative receivership, but what struck me was the work ethic of the people and the variety of industry carried out, including an apiary, a vineyard, a goose farm and orange groves. The apiary is renowned for the quality of its honey. In a reminder of Naomi
Shemer’s Al Kol Eileh—Over All of These—with its contrast of life’s emotions between the sweetness of honey and the bee’s sting, one senses a strong resolve among its people to succeed against all odds.

Whenever I visit the land, that resolve can be felt across the country, from Metulla in the north to the Negev and the Arava in the south. A melting pot of hard-working, industrious people striving to make their way in a difficult environment, often punching above their weight for a decent life and to put food on the table for their families.

This is Israel, a country built upon the spirit of its pioneers like Rabin, the soldier hardened by combat who died with a blood-stained piece of paper in his pocket. It was at his grave-side, that our guide revealed the words written on it were those of Shir Leshalom—Song of Peace—that yearns for the day when the miracle of peace will also come.
I was watching Crocodile Dundee on Israel’s Channel One when I got a phone call from my neighbour.

“There’s been a shooting at the peace demonstration,” he told me.

I was at home with my newborn daughter and three-year-old son, while my husband was at the square where Israelis were euphorically singing songs of peace that finally seemed like they were not just empty words.

Crocodile Dundee was still on TV when I got off the phone, with a tickertape reporting an incident. I switched to Channel Two, live from the rally. It was still unclear what had happened, and since we had no mobile phones, I needed to watch to know if my husband was alright. It was a while before we understood that Yitzhak Rabin had been shot, and the shooter apprehended.

The next morning, our son woke to find both his parents in front of the TV, crying. “Did you know him? Was he your friend?” he asked, puzzled and probably a little scared.

We were all puzzled and frightened by the assassination, by the fact that violence had been used as a tool to change our political reality.

The next election campaign was brutal and divisive: ‘Peres will divide Jerusalem’ was the slogan, complete with scary soundtrack and horror-film graphics. My country felt like it was moving away from me. Brutality and divisiveness seemed like they had won. Three bullets, preceded by months of incitement to violence, had succeeded in changing the course of our history.
Like good Australians, my husband and I vote in every single Israeli election, even though it’s not compulsory. We host election parties to watch the results. Sometimes we’ve had big screens and a barbeque, other times we’ve been more circumspect. Our Israeli-born neighbours are always up for a cold beer and a friendly bet on the results, even in the times when it’s clear the other side is going to win. That’s what democracy ought to be about: celebrating its very existence.

When Ariel Sharon ran for office in 2001, I put a sticker on my car that said ‘Sharon = war’ (in reference to his stint as defence minister during the war in Lebanon). When he won, I pulled it off, despite the damage that it did to my car’s paint job. For me, democracy required that I both freely express my opinions, and accept the will of the majority. (Plus, I hoped like hell he was not going to embroil us in a war.)

In 1994, my prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, won the Nobel Prize for Peace. The accords he signed still form the basis of Israel’s relationship with Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The peace that he envisioned is still on the table, 25 years after his assassination. Rabin, who resigned his first term because of his wife’s overseas bank account, was a shining example of what the world needs now more than ever: a moral politician who led by example and always put his country first.

When I watch today’s demonstrators against our current prime minister, I am filled with pride and appreciation for their vigilance and non-violent expression of opinion. I watch a new generation of activists who have grown up with Rabin’s legacy and have been taught the lessons learned, though in November 1995 many were not yet born or too young to understand what had happened.
Like most of today’s protesters, I did not know Rabin personally; we were not of the same generation, and I was too young to have witnessed his early accomplishments. And yet, we have all been profoundly affected by his life and his death, in ways that will continue to reverberate through the generations.
Rabin and the youth

Yael Grunsein

*If there won’t be a movement of young people—and I mean your movement—that will know how to stand up, to support peace, and to resist the killers—those who want to assassinate peace… This is the movement that you have to be. This is your future… If there is anything that is unique about youth, it’s the tendency towards rebellion against conventions. That is, not just for the sake of being a rebel, but for the sake of creating change…*

- Yitzhak Rabin’s address to Hanoar Ha’oved Vehalomed (Habonim Dror’s sister youth movement in Israel), 19 March 1994

Yitzhak Rabin is rightfully remembered as a champion of peace, democracy and dialogue. Of course, he did not expect to achieve this alone, nor with just the help of his Knesset. He placed a demand on the youth movements to stand alongside him and lead a nation towards peace. Not only this, he saw the inherent and powerful role the youth hold within society and guided us to fulfil our potential. As a member of Habonim Dror Australia, Rabin’s investment in youth movements continues to inspire the hope I have for Zionism, democracy and peace.

The youth today are at the forefront of climate change activism, feminist and queer rights activism, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. At Habonim Dror Australia, we proudly advocate for these causes and their foundational beliefs. For many of us, what seems more difficult is proudly, wholeheartedly advocating for Zionism. One reason that this is the case is because our Socialist-Zionist ideology is not reflected in the way Israel currently looks, nor mainstream Zionism. Instead, over the last few years, the Israeli government seems to be moving further away from a vision that Habonim Dror supports.
Throughout this year, Habonim Dror ‘bogrimot’—leaders—have had many peulot—programs—where we learn and grapple with our movement’s form of Zionism. For myself, two facts have become clear throughout this educational process. First is that Socialist-Zionism is an ideology I endorse and one that has influenced many of my beliefs and actions. This includes my choice to live in kvutsah—commune—with my movement partners this year in Sydney. Secondly, Socialist-Zionism in the way that inspiring leaders including Zivia Lubetkin, Hannah Szenes, Martin Buber and AD Gordon envisaged it, is largely not reflected in the current State of Israel. The tension I find myself in is whether to continue pursuing Socialist-Zionism, or whether my form of Zionism is an anachronistic, impossible dream. To me, Rabin reaffirms that the latter is untrue.

Rabin’s vision of Israel—one in which peace and security are realised for all—demanded hope, foresight and courage. This vision was in no way obvious and, in fact, contradicted the way Israel often looked since establishment. Irrespective of this, Rabin was able to dream of peace tactically and empathetically. Here, Rabin inspires me to remember that optimistic foresight is essential and can lead to great positive change. This, in itself, is a rebellious act. Mordechai Anielewicz, a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, when describing the conditions of the ghetto, said that we must revolt against our reality. We cannot adjust to the conditions of our present if, within ourselves, we know they are not right. This sentiment was realised by Rabin and must be understood by all who hope for peace in the land of Israel. We must rebel against apathy and cynicism, instead espousing the hope and courage that Rabin exhibited. By employing this outlook, all Habonim Dror members can reaffirm that a belief in Socialist-Zionism is relevant and necessary.

Of course, a vision does not amount to anything without action. When Rabin demanded the youth movements “stand up”, “support” and “resist”, I believe he meant through dialogue. In 2018, during
my shnat hachshara program with Habonim Dror, I attended the Asefa Yisraelit—Israel Assembly—in Rabin Square. Lead by Hanoar Ha’oved Vehalomed, this event was originally created—and today serves—as a commemoration of Rabin’s assassination. Thousands of youth and adults gathered from all parts of Israeli society to sit in small circles and discuss pressing Israeli issues. I remember sitting in a circle with about 12 other young people. There were Orthodox Israelis, Arab Israelis, Ethiopian Israelis and secular Ashkenazi Israelis, who all voiced differing opinions. We discussed the issue of public transport on Shabbat. While it was difficult to keep up with the native Hebrew speakers, the discussion re-inspired my belief in the capabilities of the youth to create long-lasting, important change that benefits all. This model of small-group dialogue is replicated in Habonim Dror Australia’s own asefot—gatherings. Dialogue underpinned by the value of ‘shivyon erech ha’adam’—the equality of humans—guides us. Similarly, Rabin’s negotiations with people from different parts of society displayed and relied on shivyon erech ha’adam. The method of actualising his optimistic hope for peace was dialogue, and I wish to emphasise this in all facets of my life.

When memorialising Rabin, we must remember his sense of belief. He believed in the possibility of peace and made great strides towards it. He believed in the importance of youth movements and inspired us to dream. He believed in the tool of dialogue and always prioritised it, no matter how unpopular an opinion may have been. In our world, it seems that simply believing is becoming increasingly difficult. Prospects of peace, functioning democracy and productive dialogue are being dismantled by growing inequalities, individualism and a post-truth world. Rabin reassures me that believing, especially when it is done together, is of utmost importance. He dedicated his life to it. Rabin believed in a vision for the State of Israel and attempted to move an entire nation with him towards it.
At Habonim Dror’s secular humanist Shabbat services, we sing the prayer Chalomoteinu Vetikvateinu in which we state, “To tell in the morning of our dreams, and in the evenings of our hopes”. It is only by expressing our vision for society that we can work towards achieving it and ensuring it accounts for all.

Rabin concluded his address at the Hanoar Ha’oved Vehalomed convention by stating:

This is why I place this demand on you—the youth movements. The youth movements in our times built an army and we built settlements because that was the need of the hour. Today the needs are different, more varied, and present more challenges for you to face. You will be tested in your ability to continue and change what there is to be changed. I wish for you to be like that. I believe you can be like that and, together, adults and youngsters, we will march this country into peace, security, prosperity and success.

As Habonim Dror, we graciously accept this demand.
I was six years old when a night of joy and hope became an era of uncertainty and confusion. My parents let us stay up late and watch the biggest peace rally in Israel’s history. I won’t lie. At first, I had no idea why my father asked my younger brother and me to go to our rooms and stay there. A child is not used to seeing his parents breaking down in tears. Little did I know that night, how this sense of care and responsibility would follow me my entire life.

I remember our first visit to Kings of Israel Square (now Rabin Square) as a family in the first week after the assassination. My parents were trying to make us live history while it was still being written, lighting the candles, leaving a painting I made in school, wearing white. Groups of youths sitting together and playing sad songs. When you are young and don’t understand, you build yourself stories, with heroes and a villain, and do your best to explain to yourself the ‘why’ and, mostly, ‘who’.

I grew up in Alfei Menashe, a small settlement near Kfar Saba. Although my extended family is Orthodox (and my cousins were involved in Bnei Akiva), my own family is secular. I was the first to be involved in the Scouts. We lived in harmony. In contrast, Israeli society struggled to pick up the pieces after the assassination. Accusations were levelled on each side. I was blind to resentment towards those different from me, or to any other group accused of being against the dream for peace—such a naïve teenager.

Today, 25 years have passed and, alongside the national narrative of the character of Yitzhak Rabin and my personal experience; I also nurture Rabin’s legacy, with responsibility and pride, as a member of the Tzofim—Israeli Scouts.
When I became a Tzofim madrich for the first time in year 10, I vowed to be the best. I wanted to create meaningful relationships. To teach them about the State of Israel while hiking on Mount Carmel, to make sure they understood what it means to be tolerant, to accept each other and to be a good scout. I did an outstanding job, up until my first summer camp. That’s when the disengagement from Gaza started. On one side of the country, my friends and I were pretending to be pioneers, building kingdoms from logs. On the other, kids my age were losing their homes and land. It felt surreal.

I spent the following months learning and reading about the role of the youth in Israel. Going back to our Zionist founders, especially David Ben Gurion, I inspired myself with the image of the ultimate Hanoar Hatzioni—productive youth—doing his best for society, building the future. But then I found this 1994 quote from Rabin, speaking to a youth movement and answering the question, “What is the role of the youth in Israel?”

Do not accept existing conventions, neither in society nor in other areas. Society needs to know how to change. A society or country that does not change degenerates. Reality is not what it was 50 years ago. Suppose there is one thing that should set youth apart. In that case, it is rebellion against conventions, not rebellion for rebellion, but rebellion for change. Maintain what deserves to exist, change what deserves to change. Many things require change.

For the first time, I understood that I did not understand a thing about my role as a youth leader. I realised that I had missed the political part of being part of a youth movement. It does not mean just taking a stand, or trusting a certain ideology, but being active, being socially involved, asking questions. I wasn’t supposed to just highlight the strengths of Israel, but also teach about its weaknesses, to help myself and others face them head-on. That speech, read 11 years after it was delivered, changed my purpose and gave me the confidence to raise my voice and be active within the
youth movement and outside it. Through my shnat sherut, my IDF service, my work as a director in the Tzofim, and today, as the executive director of Hatzofim Australia and Garin Tzabar. Whenever our madrichim and madrichot are preparing the annual ceremony for Rabin, or teaching about Israeli leaders, or when I prepare young olim before moving to Israel with Garin Tzabar, we learn about Israel, its complexity together with its remarkable achievements. And, as Rabin also taught, we’ll keep a place for hope.

I find a second example of the power of Rabin’s words in the decision of the youth movements in Israel to commemorate Rabin together. You could feel that society was broken and separated into groups, more than ever. Israel’s numerous youth movements operate under different ideologies, from all points of the political map. Rabin’s murder saw them unite, for the first time in many years, for a common cause. In one voice, they practiced Rabin’s most crucial legacy: To fight for ourselves—to make our society stronger, united, more democratic. Since 2016, we have stood there, year after year, avoiding the politics of the day, wearing our khaki, blue, white, green shirts. We argue, of course, but all are there to remember that, as the leaders of tomorrow, we must remember Rabin. To tell his story to not give up on our country, “change what deserves to change”, fight for our democracy and, above all, to never accept violence. It’s hard to exaggerate how emotional it is to bring my madrichim and chanichim to these events.

Finally, I believe that Rabin left us with two essential values; it is our duty to pass these onto future generations. The first is responsibility. Our responsibility as a society and as individuals, to study, correct and bear the consequences of our choices. Responsibility will give us the confidence to follow our beliefs and shape our way of life. Responsibility requires us to exercise discretion, not to take for granted what we were told. Not to follow shrewd politicians and not to chase alternating stars. It requires us to see each other as equal, despite any differences of opinion,
culture, religion, gender or ideology. It is the obligation to conduct dialogue, sometimes to get angry, but always to be forgiving.

The second imperative is hope.

The hope that Rabin instilled in us was not just about peace and prosperity as a Jewish and democratic state, at peace with its neighbours. He also instilled in us the hope that this peace would bring with it a new spirit of Israelism, of strengthening Israeli society and the Jewish/Zionist/Israeli character. People that live together, in unity.

In the last few years, we have witnessed the most significant split in Israeli society. Whole groups are moving away from each other. Our society is in an uprising, protesting, complaining, and it might not change.

We must not accept today’s Israel as the best it can be. True, nothing is simple. But look at Israel’s youth. The youth that continues to volunteer, to initiate, to plough the land length and breadth. Youth who enlist in the best units or do a year of service and preparation, encouraging discourse, educating others. On their way, they criticise, ask questions, confront.

This Israeli youth is different. They are not of a generation that grew up with the loss of hope. They are the generation that is suffering from its affects, but are still looking for new opportunities in all walks of life. The generation that commands us to believe in change and to go in new ways.

From the sense of mission, the sense of belonging and responsibility, we will continue to mark the day of Rabin’s assassination. Rabin’s legacy is not just his murder. It is his yearning for peace and the reminder of how vital it is to protect our democracy, to resist incitement and violence. And we have our youth to remind us.
The Israeli assembly

Noa Shaul

On 31 October 2015, in Israel on a shnat hachshara gap year program with Habonim Dror, I gathered with 100,000 other people for the annual Yitzhak Rabin memorial rally at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. I was not alive on 4 November 1995, the day Rabin was murdered. Yet, as I stood surrounded by a sea of people chanting in Rabin’s memory, I realised his life and legacy have influenced my entire journey of involvement in a Jewish community on the complete other side of the world from where he lived his life. At that rally in 2015, Bill Clinton spoke and called for peace: “all of you must decide when you leave here tonight... how to finish the last chapter of his story”. As someone who was not even alive at the time of his assassination, how am I meant to finish the last chapter of Rabin’s story?

I began my youth movement journey in 2013, when I was in Year 11. Coming from a public school with no previous connection to the Jewish community, looking back, the decision to go on shnat after only being involved in the movement for two years should have been harder. But, at the time, it felt like the obvious way forward if I wanted to remain involved and continue the work of the movement, inspiring young people as I myself had been inspired. I remained involved upon returning, first within my own movement and then going on to be the chairperson (and, later, executive officer) of the Australasian Zionist Youth Council (AZYC), the roof body organisation of the seven Zionist youth movements in Australia and New Zealand. What I have seen over the past five years as a madricha in the youth movement community is a relentless commitment to Zionism in all movements, regardless of their ideology.
Rabin was antithetical to what we often hear in today's world—that one person can't make a change, that a dream for a more united and peaceful world is radical and naïve. In him, we see a glimmer of hope that perhaps our visions aren't just a figment of particularly active imaginations. That maybe, each and every one of us has the capacity to inspire, unify and touch the hearts of an entire nation, as Rabin did. This legacy that Rabin left encapsulates the very essence of the youth movements. It strengthens and validates the work done by every madrich/a, striving to change the world through educating one person at a time, and ignites the excitement in every chanich/a that what they're doing isn't for nothing, that they alone can make a difference.

I have worked with hundreds of youth movement madrichim/ot over the past five years and have experienced and seen how each madrich/a goes through the process of choosing to commit to their movement. Being a youth movement madrich/a means something much deeper than volunteering for two hours a week at a not-for-profit organisation. I am continuously blown away by the unwavering commitment of our madrichim/ot to their chanichim/ot, their ideologies, and the State of Israel. While Rabin’s ideas may not have spoken to every individual, it is hard to deny his commitment to the cause he believed in and it inspires me to see this reflected in our community’s young leaders today.

However, Rabin’s legacy doesn’t end at the level of individual empowerment. Rabin believed in the power of the collective to bring about meaningful change, and showed this in his compassion and open heart towards those who, in the eyes of many, had seemingly diametrically opposing beliefs to him. Rabin sought to overcome these differences and find the basic common goals that Israelis and Palestinians shared, and this allowed them to come together and achieve great things. The AZYC strives towards this same goal—for every youth movement, regardless of ideology, to be able to overlook their differences and join under their
common goal of educating and inspiring the next generation of Zionist Jewish leaders.

In my roles at the AZYC, I have seen how so many madrichim/ot choose to follow the path of dialogue and acceptance and recognise that each individual movement is stronger when it is part of a wider youth movement community. The relationship madrichim/ot have with each other under the AZYC is not an obvious relationship and, over the past five years, I have often taken it for granted that some of my closest friends and partners in my youth movement journey are from movements that are ideologically opposed to the one from which I came. The AZYC has managed to not only bring madrichim/ot from different movements into the same room, but to create an environment where dialogue and mutual respect dominate, and the youth are able to come together to dream of a more united Israel.

What is perhaps most reassuring is that this unity also exists amongst Israel's youth movements. Since 2016, the youth movements in Israel have led an initiative called Asefa Yisraelit—Israeli Assembly—which brings together people from different youth movements each year on the anniversary of Rabin's assassination, to sit together in circles and engage in discussions about democracy in Israel. There is a sense of hope and beauty that comes from knowing that thousands of young people from across the political spectrum gather each year to dedicate a day to learning about each other's values in a respectful way.

So, this year, as we remember the life and legacy of one of Israel's most historic figures and most devoted leaders, I remember that Rabin himself was a graduate of a youth movement and that our movements here in Australia—and our counterparts in Israel—embody his mission. It fills me with pride to see how all seven Zionist youth movements have taken on the important role of striving for a better and more united Zionist community. While Israel might be more polarised than ever—and it is hard to look to our
homeland for an example of what a united community looks like—the youth movements have paved their own path. They manage to rebel against all expectations and come together to shine a light onto how a united Israel can look. Rabin’s story is most certainly not complete, but I am certain that the ‘last chapter of his story’ will be written by the youth of today.
My Song for Peace

Sapir Atias

I’m not sure I can define what Yitzhak Rabin symbolised for me. How his life affected mine, my decisions as a grown up. I was a little girl, nine years old, that honestly knew nothing about politics. The only thing I knew, was that something was happening, that would change our world, and would affect it for a while.

I remember watching the rally. I remember a sense of euphoria, of change, of good things that were about to happen. Watching the nice man that I loved (without knowing why) singing a song for peace.

I always loved and respected the elderly. They always looked so wise to me. I felt Rabin was so intelligent, with years of experience, and I knew that whatever he was trying to do, was for sure for the greater good.

I come from a bit of an odd family when it comes to politics. My dad is very much on the right, while the rest of the family is on a scale between centre and left. But even my father, a sworn Likudnik, valued Rabin very much. He might not have agreed with some of his opinions, but ultimately, we are a humanistic family. We care about people and making life better for everyone, and we all sensed that this was what Rabin tried to do.

It is hard to explain the overall atmosphere the day after the murder. Everywhere you went, everything was quiet, as if time had stopped. A shock that one of us pulled the trigger, and thoughts about what would happen now. So many conversations, about fault, right and left.

To school, we automatically wore white. After all, this is what you wear on a memorial day. And we all knew today would be one as
well. We were asked to take the time, to process. Draw a painting, a letter, write what we felt. I wrote a poem. My Song for Peace. My father the Likudnik was so emotional that he printed it and promised he would put it on Rabin’s grave for me. The next day, he was already on his way. Wrapped it up nicely, so it wouldn’t get wet, put it on top of the pile and took a picture, for remembrance.

A year later, a girl, older than me, approached me at school. We had never spoken before, and she just asked, “did you write a song for Rabin?” She showed me the book Children write to Rabin and, right there, on the second page, my song. Apparently, that big pile was collected and turned into a book. I was excited, a little proud. And kept it as well, as a remembrance.

I haven’t thought about that poem in a long time. And never really read it with an adult’s perspective. But now, for this collection of thoughts about Rabin, I thought it might be a good reference point. I tried to get it. Mine is stored away somewhere. Bookshops don’t really have it. In the end, I got it from an unexpected source. My father (Likudnik and anti-left) keeps it in a frame, on display at his house! A song for peace. I am not sure if he fully understands why it is so weird for me, but this is the best mirror to how our life in Israel is so full of contradictions.

I can’t say how sure I am that my life decisions were influenced by the murder, or what I’ve learned. Maybe understanding how far we might get fuelled with hatred. I have always hated the use of the word hate. It is such an intense word, too intense to be used on humans, too final. If you truly hate someone, you will never get along or find common ground.

I think that learning about Rabin, about his life, more than his death, I try to emulate some of his characteristic. I volunteered wherever I could, with every population sector I could. I took part in a few co-existence projects, which was very un-common where I grew up, while hoping that I was showing others what was possible.
That behind all the clichés, stand people, that just want to live. And today, I try to bring this complexity and depth to Australia, as a shlicha for Hashomer Hatzair and Aliyah with the Jewish Agency.

I look at this poem, so simple, so naïve. Yet, still true, 25 years later. It makes me feel sad, that in our unique country, such young people need to deal with so many difficult things, and that this is our normal. I live in the southern part of Israel, and had to live with the threat of missiles and different wars. But again, his life, not his death, taught me the importance of patience and, more importantly, about tolerance and acceptance. That yes, people make tough decisions in life, just like Rabin in both his political life and his personal life. At the time, they seem like the right decisions. But it is OK to change your mind. To learn and adapt. To understand that there is a different way, we just need to be brave enough to walk it.

The feeling of sadness, and loss. Side-by-side with hope. This complexity, so rooted in our life. A monumental event that takes us back and not forward, but brings us together. This national sadness, the common need for remembrance, reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters, even if we don’t agree. This is our life as Israelis. But I think that this is exactly what makes us strong. And eventually, brings us hope.
שיר על살ום

הדרר על살ום, נצמת חלום.
די לאלימוח, רק על살ום.
לא לאלימוח, כ' על살ום.

השלם הז לא ריכ דידות, אלאzech
הехал הז לא ריכ לזרוג, אלא לזרוג והיה
ואם לא נ지원 ביהד ענס - לא יידי שלום.

עשינו שלם עם מתיר, והבל היה ביטור.
עשינו שלם עם וחדרו והתחדרו.
עשינו שלם עם הפולטנארים, ולא כל האורח הסכימה.

ocrat ממת המנהיג杉ן, ולא כל חטא
וזה maken שמראה שבינינו ערי שלום.

מניחונן תוסה ולא הצלית
נוריה ונסער מ센터 של אדחת

הצל, הצל כ הצל חצוי
השלם, חאןבה, אפיל חקוחר

והולום לאyrıca, והולום לזרוק
בולון המומרים באומרים של לאן סוף
בי PC וידעור רבו ת玢 שים
גי, העצמות פרצה בינ' כלום

בי קר רבק, להרהב פס
ונצגן עלייר על נאוד
השכוא גורמת להבל, אפיל למלוחמה
לא רק בוכ מזרית, אלא ברוחביה

גנשה ליהמשך, את הכהלי
להרהב פס, להרהב פס...
Yitzhak Rabin was, without doubt, a statesman—and a leader who transcended party politics, factionalism and the smallness of internal intrigue. He looked solely at the national interest and the affairs of the state. As the first prime minister of Israel born in the land, Rabin’s name is bound up in the defence and security of the Jewish state. Before he became IDF chief-of-staff and then prime minister, he commanded a brigade in the Haganah during the War of Independence, and played an essential role in securing the road to Jerusalem, which enabled Israel to keep its capital.

Rabin provided a link between the old, pre-state ways of ramshackle defence by the tower and stockade, the reclamation and cultivation of land through sheer enterprise and labour, and the ensuing modern achievements in economics and diplomacy in the middle decades of Israel’s existence.

He understood that a powerful Israel within defensible borders was key to the survival and revival of the Jewish people. He also understood that the state could not thrive or long endure from behind walls and instead had to look outward towards its neighbours and become an integrated, accepted member of the international community.

There was a ferocity in Rabin, an iron will to defend the security and peace of Israel and to see no further wars, for he knew war well. Rabin recalled in his acceptance speech of the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize,

*at an age when most youngsters are struggling to unravel the secrets of mathematics and the mysteries of the Bible; at an age when first love blooms; at the tender age of sixteen, I was handed a rifle so that I could defend myself—and also, unfortunately, so that I could kill in an hour of danger.*
But there was also a vulnerability to Rabin. He was known to blush easily, particularly when eliding the truth, and was prone to fits of nervous tension. A close aid recounted that on the flight to Washington where Rabin was to shake the hand of Arafat in front of the world and sign accords that would grant legitimacy to a nemesis, he was full of agitation, unable to sleep and was overcome by anxiety.

When it came time for Rabin to clasp the hand of Arafat, a man who had spilled so much Jewish blood, the sincerity and honesty of Rabin was laid bare. While Arafat—for whom duplicity and guile came easily—appeared to almost purr with delight during the handshake, Rabin’s face was of stone, betraying the gravity of the moment and Rabin’s inner conflict. He was signing the Oslo accords to ensure the security of the State of Israel, to chart a new path of peace, and to seize opportunities in the wider region for cooperation and normalization of relations between Israel and the moderate Arab world. But in accepting Arafat and the PLO as a peace partner, he would be rehabilitating terrorists into legitimate political actors and facilitating the return of the PLO leadership from exile in Tunis to within miles of sovereign Israel.

At the signing of the Israeli–Palestinian Interim Agreement in Washington in 1995, Rabin turned to Arafat and beseeched him:

*Chairman Arafat, together we should not let the land flowing with milk and honey become a land flowing with blood and tears. Don’t let it happen. If all the partners to the peacemaking do not unite against the evil angels of death by terrorism, all that will remain of this ceremony are colour snapshots, empty mementos. Rivers of hatred will overflow again and swamp the Middle East.*

The events of the ensuing years indeed reduced the high hopes of the Oslo process to the stuff of faded snapshots. The peacemaking and signed agreements of the ’90s were surpassed by the sheer carnage of the second intifada in the first half of the next decade.
Whether the conflict would have taken a different course but for the assassination of Rabin is one of the great imponderables of modern history.

What is clear is that the assassination of Rabin was a moment of great shame for the State of Israel and the Jewish people. That a great pioneer of the state should meet his end at the hands of another Israeli and Jew dealt a powerful blow to Israeli self-conception and shattered any belief that extremism and madness were present only in Israel's enemies.

While the assassination of Rabin and the profile of his killer have perhaps made some reticent to dwell for any length of time on Rabin’s life and legacy, in reality his mark on Israeli society is independent of the circumstances of his death. This is also true of other great statesmen who fell to their own extremists, Dr Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Ghandi.

Rabin’s final public words, spoken to an adoring crowd in Tel Aviv at what is now known as Rabin Square, were these:

*This rally must send a message to the Israeli public, to the Jewish community throughout the world, to many, many in the Arab world and throughout the entire world, that the people of Israel want peace, support peace, and for that, I thank you very much.*

We see today that, 25 years after that black day, Rabin’s message of peace directed at his citizens, and to the Jewish and Arab peoples, was indeed heard and his grand vision of a strong and secure Israel living at peace with its neighbours is being fulfilled before our eyes.
A man of honour

Mark Leibler

One of my most prized possessions, which hangs in pride of place on a wall of my study, is the first page of a set of lithographs by the renowned Israeli artist, Yosl Bergner. It is inscribed in the hand of Yitzhak Rabin: “To Mark Leibler, with long friendship. 13 April 1994”.

In commemorating the 25th anniversary of Rabin’s assassination, a day I remember vividly, my enduring sorrow is felt on more than one level. It is in no way abstract, as is the case with history that has been merely read or heard.

The lithograph, also inscribed by the Australian prime minister at the time, Paul Keating, was gifted to me in May 1994, after serving for ten years as president of the Zionist Federation of Australia. I had previously served as president of Zionism Victoria, and it was in this role that I first met Rabin, in the early 1980s, when he was a member of the Knesset and its prestigious Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee.

I met with him regularly thereafter, always with a cigarette in his hand and an overflowing ashtray by his side. Our final meeting, which was focused on security issues and relations with the Jewish Diaspora, took place in the Prime Minister’s office in Jerusalem in late October 1995, just days before his assassination.

Ask most interested observers of Israel’s leaders to nominate the singular achievements of Rabin, they will speak, without hesitation, of his military heroism, the pivotal role he played in the Six Day War, the bold rescue at Entebbe and, of course, the vision for peace he sought to pursue through the Oslo accords.
I also admired Rabin for all these achievements but, looking back, it was another chapter of his remarkable life story that struck me as demonstrating a style of political leadership that regrettably no longer exists.

Less than six weeks before the general election of 1977, an election the ruling Labour Party was on a trajectory to win, Prime Minister Rabin withdrew his candidacy.

The first indication of the scandal that, for all intents and purposes, had ended Rabin’s political career, came to light when a journalist learned of a US dollar account, jointly held by the prime minister, but managed by his wife Leah, in the National Bank of Washington. The account had been left open since 1973, when Rabin had ended his term as ambassador to the United States.

It was, at the time, illegal for Israeli citizens to hold foreign bank accounts. While the sum involved was small and authorities described it as a technical breach on the prime minister’s part, in the case of his wife, they insisted on a full criminal investigation.

The affair had not been a major campaign issue so when Rabin withdrew his candidacy, the announcement came as a bombshell, which he explained this way: “I could not accept that, because I feel the formal responsibility is a joint responsibility and, if my wife is to be investigated, I will not hide behind parliamentary immunity.”

In his biography of Rabin, published in June 1977, Robert Slater conveyed an account by Rabin’s former adviser Yehuda Avner—later Israel’s ambassador to Australia—of wandering the streets of Jerusalem after hearing the prime minister’s shock announcement.

Avner had heard one man say: “I didn’t like him but he’s the most honest man in Israel”. He also overheard an elderly woman shouting at her husband, “Rabin has done one thing at least—he’s taught all you men how to behave towards your women!”
How many incumbent political leaders across the western world would make such a decision today? How many would hold themselves to such a high standard of integrity?

Of course, the incident did not end Rabin’s political career and, following his re-election as prime minister in 1992, I continued to meet with him regularly whenever I was in Israel. He had accepted my invitation to come to Australia that year for the annual Yom Ha’atzma’ut celebrations, but the timing of the election forced him to cancel and, sadly, he never had another opportunity to visit here.

Probably the longest and most interesting time I spent with him was at a dinner I attended a few years earlier with my wife, Rosanna, at the home of Amos Eiran, when Rabin was defence minister. Eiran had been Rabin’s chief-of-staff at the time of the Entebbe rescue and I had come to know him through my membership of the Board of Governors of Haifa University, where he served as president.

The third couple at the dinner were Larry and Barbi Weinberg. Larry, an American who had made his fortune in real estate, was a huge backer of AIPAC and had served as its president for several years.

The six of us spoke for many hours about all manner of issues, most earnestly about the impact of the first intifada. Rabin was a shy man but, at the same time, he exuded and engendered great confidence. His words were insightful and direct, spoken in that gravelly smoker’s voice of his. Above all, he came across unfailingly authentic as a person.

This quality was evident for all to see at the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, which I attended on 26 October 1994 in the Arava Valley, north of Eilat. The handshake between Rabin and King Hussein was genuinely, unmistakably warm. The two men had met in secret for almost two decades and had come to trust one another.
No such human connection had been apparent when the Oslo accords were consummated just over a year earlier. Looking back at the official photograph marking the occasion, it appears US President Bill Clinton almost had to push Rabin into shaking hands with Yasser Arafat.

The biggest criticism anyone can (and does) make of Rabin was that he led Israel into these ultimately futile negotiations with the PLO chairman. But who was to know?

After he left office, I once had the opportunity to ask Clinton why he thought Arafat had walked away from Camp David in July 2000. He told me that the Palestinians were not ready to accept Israel's right to exist and he believed Arafat was frightened of being assassinated himself.

Which only reinforces the sense I had then—and the sense that remains with me today—that Oslo reflected Rabin’s selfless desire to do whatever he could to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and with countries in the surrounding area. A desire for which he was prepared to risk and, ultimately pay with, his life—ironically, at the hands of an Israeli extremist.

I learned of his assassination while I was en route from Israel back to Melbourne on 4 November 1995. I had left Israel before the news broke, spent one night in Bangkok but didn’t watch television or read the papers, and only saw the images on the TV screens when I arrived back at the airport the following morning.

I became so distressed, I could neither eat nor drink on the flight and returned home quite ill from dehydration.

In the concluding paragraph of The Rabin Memoirs, published in 1979, Rabin posed a profound question that challenges a present-day response from every one of us:
Jewish history shows that the Jews have always stood together in times of trial, while in tranquil days each community turned to tending its own garden. How, then, will we maintain the ties with our people once the drama and romance in our life recede?

When I look at the tensions in the relationship between Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora today—particularly in the United States—my old friend’s words were characteristically prescient.

So too, perhaps, was his vision for peace.

The treaty with Jordan took effect the year before Rabin was assassinated. Despite all efforts and yearning, it has taken 26 years for the next meaningful agreements to be achieved – the Abraham Accord between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the normalisation of full diplomatic and security relations with the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the more recent announcement of normalisation with the Republic of Sudan.

If Rabin had lived, perhaps we would be further advanced in our efforts than we are. But we have reached a milestone that points to a better destination, and that finally affords us a sense of hope that something of his dream will be realised.
Just 50 years ago, during the cocktails preceding a UJA dinner for Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir at the New York Hilton, Ambassador Yitzhak Rabin received a message.

‘Please phone Henry Kissinger. Urgently.’

Rabin placed the call. Richard Nixon’s national security adviser was somewhat agitated. The White House had received a request from an embattled King Hussein. Kissinger’s question to Rabin: Would Israel’s air force attack the Syrian tank columns that had invaded northern Jordan—and save the king?

As Rabin recounts in his memoirs, he “stole Golda from the cocktail party and moved off into another room” to tell her about the Kissinger phone call. They phoned Acting Prime Minister Yigal Allon and Defence Minister Moshe Dayan in Jerusalem, and waited for Kissinger to speak to Nixon and call back.

There was much to discuss, but not much time to decide. Some 300 Syrian tanks had begun moving into Jordan on 19 and 20 September 1970. Nominally, to support the Palestinian terrorists facing defeat in the Jordanian army’s brutal ‘Black September’ campaign against them. More ominously, with Moscow’s support, to overthrow Hussein and gain control of a Western ally and Israel’s neighbour.

Israel was ready to move. But in addition to the promise of American political support, Rabin asked the United States to protect its Egyptian flank if it came under attack along the Suez Canal from Soviet forces.
Moscow had armed and backed Gamal Abdel Nasser in the three-year War of Attrition that had followed the 1967 Six Day War. Just weeks earlier, on 30 July 1970, Israeli Phantoms had shot down five Soviet MiG-21s over Egypt in an encounter that led the Kremlin to threaten severe retaliation against Israel.

Now, just seven weeks later, Jordan’s fate hung in the balance.

So as soon as Nixon and Kissinger gave the green light, the IDF strengthened its forces on the Golan Heights and its air force prepared to intervene. Through diplomatic channels, Washington warned Moscow bluntly to persuade the Syrians to turn back. To reinforce the diplomacy, Nixon put the 82nd Airborne Division on alert and ordered the Mediterranean Sixth Fleet’s aircraft carriers eastward. A group of American officers took off from one of the carriers for Israel to plan combined operations.

In the tense 48 hours that followed, Rabin became the interlocutor between the Israeli government, the IDF, and the White House’s Situation Room. In his words, he became “the major source of intelligence on the conflict” in Nixon’s Washington.

The IDF’s former chief-of-staff, Major-General Yitzhak Rabin (ret) was in his element. He was not only at the centre of events; he was orchestrating them.

In the event, the Jordanian army performed better than expected, Moscow pressured Hafez al-Assad, then Syria’s defence minister, and Damascus withdrew the tanks. The crisis was over. A wider war had been prevented.

Summarised this way, the September 1970 crisis may strike today’s reader as just another chapter in the plethora of Cold War dramas and crises in the Middle East. But it was far more than that. It was one of those real turning points in the game of nations. Especially for Rabin. Then, and now.
Then, because Rabin’s leadership during the crisis was a key factor in creating the ‘special relationship’ between Washington and Jerusalem.

Now, because the 25th anniversary of his assassination is another opportunity for reappraising his achievement and legacy. Which is why I believe Rabin’s time in Washington as ambassador deserves far more attention than it has received.

As indeed do two other significant contributions he made to Israel’s history.

In his resignation statement as prime minister in 1977, Rabin said that he hoped he’d done his duty as the IDF’s chief-of-staff in preparing it for the Six Day War, as ambassador in Washington, and as a prime minister who’d helped to heal the nation’s wounds and divisions after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. My focus in this essay is on Rabin as ambassador in Washington. But it’s part of the wider argument that Rabin’s earlier achievements—each of which were individually enough to earn his place as a great Israeli leader—have been largely overshadowed by his last three years as peacemaker and assassinated martyr for the cause.

More on that topic later. First, my own Washington memoir.

In arguing the case for a re-assessment of some Cold War events in 1970, which also call for a re-assessment of Rabin’s legacy, I must declare an interest, and a bias.

My interest is that I was also in Washington during these events. As a journalist, I came to know something about the crisis in Jordan from some of the actors directly involved. Including from Rabin himself. And my bias is that in Washington I became, and remain, a ‘Rabinist’.
For some two of the more than four years that I was a Washington correspondent, I had the unexpected opportunity and privilege to observe Rabin close-up.

Unexpected, because I hadn’t come to Washington in early 1969 to report on Israel, but to open the first Washington bureau for The Australian, then Rupert Murdoch’s fledgling national newspaper.

But in 1970, I also became the Washington correspondent for the Jerusalem Post.

Since the Post agreed to let the Mapam daily, Al Hamishmar, translate my copy into Hebrew, this opened the door to the Israeli embassy and to Rabin. After all, Mapam was the left-wing party that had joined Mapai—the Labour party to which Rabin belonged—to form Israel’s Alignment government after the 1969 elections.

This new role meant I joined the small group of mainly Hebrew-speaking journalists who represented the morning paper Davar, and the two evening papers, Maariv and Yediot Achronot.

And so, much to my surprise, came the privilege. I found myself seeing Rabin regularly at his formal press conferences and off-the-record briefings.

Which he usually gave wreathed in cigarette smoke. Rabin was a notorious chain-smoker. He used the ritual of lighting up and inhaling while he listened to our questions to pause and think about the answers. Which were usually short. Abrupt. Monosyllabic even. And frequently dismissive. Especially about Israeli politicians with whom he disagreed.

Such as Foreign Minister Abba Eban. “Only those people who went to Cambridge (a reference to Eban’s alma mater) can understand such matters”, Rabin would say derisively. Or, “For this you really have to be a diplomat”. Without mentioning Eban by name but
conveying the clear message that he reported directly to Prime Minister Meir, and so could ignore instructions from Eban who, as foreign minister, was nominally his boss.

More generally, as he saw it, the lack of understanding by others in the Israeli government about the big picture in Washington frustrated him. Rabin, however, was ambitious. He looked forward to joining Israel's government as a minister after his term as ambassador.

Knowing that he had to play provincial politics from afar, and that the Israeli press in Washington was the necessary vehicle for playing it, annoyed him. Sometimes the annoyance showed. That was when he would accompany his comments with his trademark grimace—a mix of resigned smile and reluctant acceptance.

Whatever his critics thought about his style, Rabin impressed me from the first meeting. I found his bluntness refreshing. He was a natural leader, and had the gift of commanding your attention. It was clear why he'd inspired confidence as a military leader. Sure. Sometimes he showed his disdain for our journalistic questions, but he always answered them directly. He could sometimes be rude, and it was no fun if you were on the receiving end. But he didn’t play favourites, and he didn’t bear grudges.

Mercifully, he didn’t indulge in ‘polispeak waffle’ either. And his strategic summaries of the Middle East and Washington’s relationship with Jerusalem, delivered in that monotone baritone, were always clear. And enthralling. Especially in the aftermath of the Syrian–Jordanian crisis.

Even so, I hadn’t fully understood how close it had come to a much wider super-power conflict until about a year later, when two Washington insiders—Rowland Evans Jr and Robert D Novak—published a book, *Nixon in the White House: The frustration of power* claimed that the Jordanian crisis
presented Nixon with the terrible drama of Kennedy’s confrontation with the Russians at Cuba in 1962, with overtones of Armageddon. As one of Nixon’s advisers said later, ‘Peace hung by the thinnest of threads’.

But unlike Kennedy’s Cuba crisis, the imminent danger of war that would put Washington and Moscow in nuclear confrontation was far less publicly exposed than it had been in 1962. Nixon’s stage was grander, his diplomatic and military problems more diffuse and complex, but the most exciting parts were played in total secrecy, beyond the capacity of the country to see and judge.

Quite a scoop. If true. Nixon’s widely-known wariness about journalists and his reluctance to give interviews was a fact of life for the White House press corps. But Evans and Novak had a reputation for their high-level sources in the administration and Congress, and that included Kissinger and Nixon himself.

So when I read that the Jordanian crisis was ‘Nixon’s Cuba’ and that it had come close to “nuclear confrontation”, I found it plausible enough to ask to see Rabin for comment. Somewhat to my surprise, he agreed. Sitting in on the interview at the embassy was Yehuda Avner, then a junior diplomat, later an adviser to Israeli prime ministers, and ambassador to Britain and Australia. In the Canberra role (1992–1995), Avner served during Rabin’s second term as prime minister.

Before I could put my first question, Rabin pre-empted the interview: “If you’ve come here to ask me about what a book says happened a year ago, you can forget about it. I’ve nothing to tell you.” Avner could see that Rabin’s response had left me nonplussed, since I’d explained to him why I wanted the interview. “Why don’t you ask the ambassador your questions without mentioning the book?” Avner suggested. Which I did.
In broad terms, Rabin confirmed the book’s claims about how close the Middle East had come to a clash between Washington and Moscow. Which could have escalated into a nuclear exchange. But Rabin insisted that the interview was on “deep background” and completely off the record. Without a source that would confirm the Evans–Novak version, I couldn’t take the story further.

Nevertheless, Rabin had made it abundantly clear that he viewed the crisis as immensely significant. He spoke in detail, for at least an hour, and with more passion than I had ever seen. As a Rabinist who followed his subsequent career after Washington with great interest, the importance he attached to the crisis became even clearer after he published his memoirs in 1979, when in the political wilderness after his 1977 resignation as prime minister.

Looking back, Rabin wrote:

_These events (in Jordan) had a far-reaching impact on US–Israelirelations. Israel’s willingness to cooperate closely with the United States in protecting American interests in the region altered her image in the eyes of many officials in Washington. We were considered as a partner—not equal to the United States, but nevertheless a valuable ally in a vital region during times of crisis._

This wasn’t just a self-serving assessment. On 25 September 1970, just days after the worst was over, Kissinger phoned Rabin to convey a formal message from Nixon to Meir.

The president will never forget Israel’s role in preventing the deterioration in Jordan, and in blocking the attempt to overturn the regime there. He said that the United States is fortunate in having an ally like Israel in the Middle East. These events will be taken into account in all future developments.
In his memoirs, Rabin downplayed the Nixon message somewhat to describe it “as probably the most far-reaching statement ever made by a president of the United States on the mutuality of the alliance between the two countries. I had never heard anything like it…” There was nothing “probably” about Nixon’s message, and Rabin had indeed never heard “anything like it”. Quite simply, because until 25 September 1970, there had been nothing like it.

The ‘new alliance’ was stress-tested to the maximum during the Yom Kippur War’s early days, when Israel was defending itself desperately against the Egyptian–Syrian onslaught.

It was Nixon, though by then deeply mired in Watergate, who remembered his 1970 pledge to Meir. Acting against the delaying tactics that Kissinger and others in the administration had employed, Nixon ordered the urgent resupply of Israel’s dwindling arms supplies. The US Air Force, flying its C-5 Galaxy transports, airlifted tanks, artillery and ammunition. It enabled the IDF to turn the tide of battle.

What followed in the next four decades almost came to be taken for granted. Yet there was nothing inevitable about the close relationship forged between Washington and Jerusalem during Rabin’s time as ambassador. There were, of course, many players that contributed to the alliance. But Rabin was the conductor who brought them and the events together. Although often tested subsequently—and far from a perfect liaison—the alliance remained a pillar of Israel’s military, political, and economic security for the next 40 years.

Only during the Barak Obama Administration (2009–2017) did the pillar begin to show serious cracks. Which, regardless of how American Jews or Israeli Jews may view him, President Donald Trump has repaired and rebuilt.
There was no ‘special relationship’ when Rabin arrived as ambassador in 1968. Israel and the Middle East were not on the American agenda. Vietnam, however, and the way it had divided the nation, undoubtedly was.

Shortly after Rabin presented his credentials, Lyndon Baines Johnson announced he wouldn’t run for president. A few days later, Martin Luther King was murdered. In the protests and riots that followed, American cities, including streets in Washington, burned in the “long, hot summer”. When a Palestinian, Sirhan Sirhan, shot and killed Robert Kennedy Jr, who was running for president, Rabin was deeply concerned.

He’d come to the United States to generate support for Israel’s security, and to guarantee it as a lone democracy against the hostile dictatorships surrounding it.

“But what I found was a country in the throes of disintegration,” he later wrote. It’s to Rabin’s abiding credit that he was a quick study, who learned to see beyond the day-to-day upheavals. He applied himself to understanding the American political system, and he learned how to use the levers of power to benefit Israel.

Itamar Rabinovich, his most recent biographer, argues, “As consequential as Rabin’s assassination was, it was his life—his decisions and actions—not his death that defines his legacy.”

He then considers that legacy in the same company as John F Kennedy’s—“the Cuban missile crisis, the Bay of Pigs, the Berlin speech, and the glamorous aura he created”. And Abraham Lincoln’s—”he ended slavery, preserved the Union, and gave the United States a model for presidential power”.

Rabinovich concludes, “Rabin’s legacy is shaped by his peace policy in his second tenure, the bold decision he took on both the Palestinian and Syrian tracks, and the high quality of his leadership”.
Some may quarrel with the Rabinovich categories of comparison. With Kennedy? With Lincoln? But he makes the important point that, just as their assassinations—especially Kennedy’s—have tended to cloud and even romanticise the historical record, much the same has happened to Rabin.

My quarrel is not with Rabinovich’s focus on Rabin’s life, rather than his death. Where I take issue is over the emphasis he gives to the last three years in assessing that legacy. This isn’t to doubt Rabin’s determination to seek peace. In the last sentence of his memoirs he wrote, “There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the risks of peace are preferable by far to the grim certainties that await every nation in war.” His experience as a soldier made that conviction even more credible.

When he concluded his first speech to the Knesset in 1992 as prime minister, the thoroughly secular Rabin offered the prayer from Psalms:

“May the Lord give His people strength; may the Lord bless His people with peace.” And he meant it deeply.

But when it comes to the legacies by which leaders are judged, history is indeed a cruel mistress, and doesn’t care much for motivation, however profoundly sincere.

It measures results. In Rabin’s case, his efforts to negotiate peace with Syria, his acceptance of the Oslo accords, and the handshake with Arafat on the White House lawn were brave. Valiant. Courageous. As a Rabinist, I hailed those efforts. I still do. And I mourn and revere his memory.

However, with the hindsight of history—that most beloved muse of pundits and commentators—it’s a moot point whether Rabin’s risks for peace were wise, or served Israel’s best interests. Many disillusioned Israelis, who otherwise regard Rabin as a national hero, and supported him at the time, must wonder.
There is simply no doubt, however, how history has rightly judged Rabin’s magnificent service to his people as their commander-in-chief in preparing for war, and going to war. And how, as I would argue, history should judge the ambassador who was instrumental in creating the US–Israel alliance.

A final point about our times and our myths. Lincoln’s funeral was not televised. But Kennedy’s and Rabin’s were.

In the latter’s case, the global telecast amplified the trauma already created in Israel and beyond after a Jewish extremist murdered a Jewish prime minister. At a peace rally. Thus, the assassination and the televised funeral coalesced together, almost as if they were one event.

Out of which grew a new Rabin narrative. With its own images, its own reframed history about the Oslo accords, and its own vision of what peace and a two-state solution might have been. “If only”.

Images. They remain indelible. President Bill Clinton’s “shalom, chaver” tribute as King Hussein listened, head bowed. Granddaughter Noa’s impassioned and heartfelt eulogy (“You were the pillar of fire that went ahead of the camp”).

And the visible pain in Eitan Haber’s shaking hands as he read the words of Shir Leshalom from the folded, blood-stained paper found in Rabin’s pocket at the hospital after the shooting.

Eitan Haber. Rabin’s loyal adviser, chief-of-staff, and speechwriter. The journalist and military correspondent who gave Rabin the Hebrew words for the sublime and the mundane. Steeped in the Jewish tradition, Haber took the words from the ancient texts, from the prophets and the poets, and from the everyday language of Israelis in the street.
Aged 80, Haber died during Sukkot’s intermediate days this year. As I was writing about Rabin, and as Israel prepares for the 25th anniversary. About which, had he lived, Haber would undoubtedly have had something to say, and write. In the event, however, I don’t think he’d mind if that was left to another writer, Amos Oz:

_Yitzhak Rabin was not a charismatic man, but rather a logical, skillful captain. He was not endowed with Ben Gurion’s prophetic passion, nor with Levi Eshkol’s warm gracefulness. He did not have Golda Meir’s sweeping simplicity, nor Menachem Begin’s populist energy. The crowd never responded to him by chanting “Rabin, Rabin”._

By being a careful engineer and a precise navigator, his personality embodied the spirit of new Israel, a country seeking not redemption but solutions.
A man of peace and Jewish peoplehood

David Mittelberg

The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin is seared in the memory of every Israeli, wherever they were that fateful night. We were at home on Kibbutz Yizreel, watching on TV the jubilant, hopeful assembly calling for peace and denouncing violence. There were smiles on everyone’s faces, great performing artists, inspiring speeches and hope was in the air. The facts are well known, played and replayed in our minds and in our media throughout the last 25 years, but the questions and the anguish still remain. How suddenly were our dreams and hopes shattered without warning, though the writing had been on the wall for all to see.

On that weekend, Shoshana and I were in preparation for a trip to the United States, not knowing we would leave our homeland at a time of national mourning and political and national shiva. We felt very bad about leaving only a few days later, but were committed to participate in the meetings of the 64th Annual General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations in Boston, from November 15 to 17, where Rabin had been scheduled to be the keynote speaker from Israel, a presentation that tragically failed to come to pass.

At the time, I was a member of the executive of the Israel Forum, founded in 1985. The Israel Forum had a motto, ‘The Jewish Direct Line’, which was derived from the Moriah Process in which I participated, that annually brought together young and emerging lay leaders from Israel and North America to address the growing distance between Israel and the Diaspora. For myself, in my involvement in the Forum, I felt, for the first time since my aliyah from Australia, that my Israeli commitment to being Jewish and my Jewish commitment to being Israeli was beginning to coalesce in a statement of purpose and action. We were
building, from the ground up, independently from the Jewish Agency, personal and communal bridges between Israel and world Jewry.

To this end, the year-long Israel experience program, Project Otzma, was established in 1986–1987, by the Israel Forum in partnership with the Council of Jewish Federations and participating Federations throughout North America. I had the privilege of being in the group of Forum leaders that conceived and implemented the Otzma program, as well as serving as its program evaluator. At the same time, I also served as a lay leader on the Afula/Gilboa partnership with Connecticut and Rhode Island. I had committed to give a few lectures to a number of Federation Young Leadership groups in communities in Connecticut and Rhode Island, on our way from New York to Boston.

In 1995, the media was pre-digital. While the news of the assassination had arrived, its implications were not well understood by our local hosts. Nor were they aware of the depth of our Israeli sorrow and grief. Arriving at the site of my first presentation in Connecticut, I couldn’t connect with my audience without making a yizkor statement, so I asked for yizkor candles to be lit and we conducted a discussion about the personal and political tragedy that had befallen us all. Only later did we move on to our subject. Subsequently, we made our way to Boston still in shock, magnified by a sense that the shock itself was not shared to the same degree by some of the affiliated, committed American Jews we had just encountered. Moreover, this shock as an Israeli in America was alien to my former roots in the very Zionist Melbourne Jewish community in which I grew up, where I imagined a quite different response would be felt in the Jewish street.

On the first night of the General Assembly, somewhat dazed and depressed, we gathered informally when Avrum Burg, then chair of the Jewish Agency, took the podium and made an impromptu speech that, in one move, brought together all those present,
into one global Jewish family of grief. Only then were we all able to begin to mourn; we are still mourning a quarter of a century later.

The General Assembly proceeded as it was bound to do, with its re-structured program that included commissions on Jewish identity and continuity, a well-attended session on Israel–Diaspora relations, as well as committee discussions on Project Otzma. Shimon Peres (by video), Henry Kissinger and Israeli Finance Minister Avraham Shochat delivered important memorial addresses for Rabin.

Echoing my own sentiments at the time, JTA reported on 21 November,

> Many of the Israeli participants said they were surprised that Israel did not assume a higher profile on the overall agenda. They said the assassination has torn their country’s fabric apart and raises critical questions about Jewish peoplehood that they would have liked to have had addressed.

In the same JTA article, Shoshana Cardin, Chair of the UIA, reported that Rabin was calling for closer partnership between Israel and the Diaspora in the weeks before the assassination. It was this clarion call, together with Rabin’s courageous call for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, that raised my hopes on both those fronts simultaneously.

Indeed, in his message to the Jewish communities in the Diaspora on the occasion of Israel’s Independence Day in April 1994, Rabin wrote,

> We invite you to be partners in the great success story that is Israel. Israel is the center of our common Jewish being, of our identity and our heritage, and your contribution and involvement are as essential as ever. At the same time, Israel must find ways of working together with you to ensure the thriving continuity of the
Flashback 15 years earlier: Rabin was not my hero, neither was his nemesis Peres. In 1979, I was drafted by the Ichud kibbutz movement to take up the position of the world secretary of Habonim. At that time, Yigal Allon was instrumental in facilitating the unification of the two largest kibbutz movements, Ichud and Meuchad. Allon was also head of the World Labour Zionist Movement, where I had the opportunity to work with him. After Allon’s February 1980 death, Rabin took up the mantle of leadership of the Allon camp, which became the Rabin camp, inside the Labour movement. The Rabin camp asserted its ambition for the leadership of the entire Labour movement, in opposition to the Peres camp. The former was seen by many as divisive, threatening Labour’s political prospects in the country. On a far smaller scale, for me, the Rabin camp literally divided the alumni of Habonim settled in over 20 kibbutzim. It generated division amongst those alumni within World Habonim institutions I chaired and within the newly merging united kibbutz movement. I had no special allegiance to Rabin or Peres, neither of whom were doves in my eyes, both being closer to the Land of Israel movement represented by Allon and Achdut Avoda. Nevertheless, I decided I had to find out why they were letting their egos generate a confrontational discourse within a party that had just lost power to Begin and had lost leadership of the country. I decided I would meet each of them and ask them why this was happening.

Access was not so difficult for me as a kibbutznik. The late Yisrael Avidor from Kfar Hanassi set up a meeting for me with Peres in his office. Shimon Sheves, who was to remain Rabin’s close and loyal advisor for many years, from Kibbutz Afik, organised the meeting with Rabin. Both men perceived me as someone who could bring supporters to their camp, and both were equally displeased by what I had come to say. After the pleasantries, I asked them why
the Rabin–Peres conflict was necessary. What was it bringing to the Labour movement, to the kibbutz movement, to Habonim? It was tearing us apart for no good reason. The only beneficiaries, I said, would be the right. I was trying to hold on to an inclusive united left in Israel, and to avoid the fragmentation characteristic of the Labour movement, throughout its history, from its past until its final demise today. Neither meeting ended well. I joined neither camp on principle. I was on the side of Labour unity and would not allow Habonim to be torn asunder, even by historical giants of the Labour movement. Little did I know that these two gentlemen would, one day, stand together as leaders of the peace movement calling for peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, and partnership between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry.

In these last 25 years in Israel, the risk of division and need for unity have increased. Judaism and democracy remain chartered on a collision course, while Israel and world Jewry are drifting apart. Rabin addressed these dangers in seeking peace between Jews, with our Arab neighbours and with the Jewish world.

Today, in the corona twilight of 2020, I remember Rabin as a man of courage who knew not only how to stand resolutely by his guns but also how to muster the courage to change his mind for the sake of the nation and its future. Rabin taught us to look forward, not backward; to be a leader in a changing world; to make the change, not follow it. Rabin taught us that an Israeli soldier can pursue peace with the Palestinians and that an Israeli can embrace world Jewry. He called on us all to pursue Jewish peoplehood together with peace with our Arab neighbours; both goals simultaneously, not just one without the other.

May his memory be an inspiration to all Jews everywhere.
When Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated on 4 November 1995 it was a terrible shock, but not entirely unexpected. In two years, from September 1993 to August 1995, Israel had experienced 11 suicide bombings by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, leaving 79 people dead and over 50 injured. Most of the bombs were in buses and bus stations—Israelis lived in a state of daily terror as they went to work, to school, to shop or to visit family. The atmosphere was riddled with deep mistrust and fear.

During this period was the signing of the first Oslo agreement by the Government of Israel and the PLO in Washington, DC in 1993, the Paris Protocol of April 1994 and the Interim Agreement in Taba, Egypt in 1995. The accords promised a road to peace with the Palestinians, but for many ordinary Israelis, ‘peace’ was a pipe dream regularly shattered by bombings that struck at the heart of civil society.

On that fateful evening at the Kings of Israel Square in Tel Aviv, Rabin, the Labour Prime Minister of Israel, was celebrating the signing of the peace agreements in a public rally, in which he echoed the famous Beatles’ refrain, “give peace a chance”. Most people assumed that his assailant was yet another Palestinian terrorist. What they did not appreciate was that some Israelis were ready to adopt the same tactics—and even the same target—as their enemies.

To strike at the leader of your own nation is a deeply cynical or desperate act, and one that has many infamous forerunners. Lincoln, Gandhi, Kennedy, Sadat, Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto immediately come to mind, but there are literally hundreds of heads of state that have been assassinated throughout history and in every country. Four American presidents alone have been
assassinated. Perhaps it stands to reason that the most visible representative of a policy with grave consequences for some would be a likely target.

What made the assassination of Rabin especially tragic was that, with a distinguished military background, he took a bold position with the hope that, after having fought for his country, he could now make peace with his enemies. Indeed, his speech on the night of his assassination began with the words, “I wish to thank each and every one of you, who have come here today to take a stand against violence and for peace.”

Not everyone present agreed. Yigal Amir was there for the opposite reason, to violently put an end to the man who uttered these words. A law student at Bar Ilan University, Amir was never going to accept a peace that was based on a denial of the Jews’ right to settle in the land of their forefathers. For Amir, this made a peace treaty with Yasser Arafat, a man who denied the ancient Jewish heritage of the land and demanded the dismantling of the settlements, nothing but a sham.

Many Israelis would have agreed that peace with Arafat was never going to bring peace to the region, but that did not in any way justify Amir’s assassination of Israel’s esteemed leader, who hoped against hope that it would. Amir’s unforgivable act, which would change Israel’s sentencing laws to prevent the parole of a person who murdered a head of state, was completely contrary to the values central to Jewish life and to democracy. Simply put, the belief in the sacred value of life created by God is the driving force in the edifice of Jewish law. Democracy’s recognition of an individual’s inalienable rights, including and most especially their sacred right to life, is the political expression of this foundational belief.

In the surrounding countries of the Middle East, where political culture relies on militant suppression, theocratic absolutism, and
monarchical power and privilege, Israel’s democracy is unique. In a region torn asunder by internecine warfare, tribal genocide and religious bigotry, Israel’s democratic government and open society, with equal rights across the religious and gender divide, is nothing short of a miracle.

Like any democracy, Israel’s is a hard won and arduous process that aspires to an ideal that is not always fully realised. Israeli society—comprising of a wide variety of Diaspora Jewish communities with diverse languages, skin colours, histories, cultural and political differences—requires an ear sensitive to the rumblings of the disgruntled and disinherited among them.

Amir was a member of one such group, the Yemeni Orthodox (Mizrachi), for whom cultural differences and economic hardship often made entry into the dominant European, Holocaust-survivor community difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, Amir was well on his way up the ladder. One of eight children, he was studying law at Bar Ilan University as part of the Kolel program, combining religious and secular studies, and joining campus protests against the Oslo accords.

In Heart of Violence: Why people harm each other (2020), Melbourne psychiatrist and traumatologist Paul Valent considers the biographies of a number of violent men. While he does not include Amir in his study, Valent examines spree killers, such as Martin Bryant, who perpetrated the Port Arthur massacre, and totalitarian leaders such as Hitler, Stalin and Mao. There are some remarkable similarities among them, such as delusions of grandeur grafted onto rather pitiable beginnings and a sense of profound alienation. Valent also identifies ‘lovelessness’ as a key factor in their lives. Grafted on to ideological visions of conquest and domination, it may be a catalyst in acts of violence that is more significant than political critics have dared to imagine.
It is well known that Amir was in a bad personal state when the Ashkenazi girl with whom he was in love and hoped to marry rejected him at her parents’ behest because he was Mizrachi, and instead married his friend. It is also a fact that Amir’s mother frequently inflated his ego, believing him to be destined for greatness. The contrast between his mother’s unrealistic expectations and his personal experience of love betrayed might have been the emotional trigger inflaming his ideological aspirations and for Amir to make his mark on what he saw as the bigger betrayal of the Jewish people by the Oslo accords. And while no one commits an act of political violence simply because they are lovelorn, it is conceivable that an individual’s sense of shame and belief in his unjustified suffering can catapult them into extreme acts for a cause they believe in.

And yet Amir, of all people, should have had a more Jewish response to his disappointment in the leadership of the day. Being a fervent student of Judaism throughout his young life, he would have been aware that the primeval sin of shedding blood—especially within the family—first represented in the Torah as Cain’s murder of his brother Abel (Gen 4:8), is the gravest sin in Jewish law and the most reprehensible of all offenses according to Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed 3:41). Indeed, as the Bible and rabbinic commentaries make clear, the shedding of blood is a disparagement of God’s own image, since man is made in God’s image (Gen 9:6; Tosefta, Yevamot 8:4, Gen Rabbah 34:4) More poignantly, the sin of the shedding of blood is even thought to be the cause of God turning away from the Land of Israel, and for the Temple to be destroyed (Tosefta Yoma 1:12, Shabbata 33a; Sifra Numbers 161).

If Amir thought he was theologically justified in shedding blood to protect Israel (as Baruch Goldstein believed when he perpetrated the massacre at the Cave of the Patriarchs on 25 February 1994, killing 29 Palestinian Muslim worshippers, and wounding 125), he was surely confusing an extremist’s understand-
ing of Torah against that of the mainstream Orthodox of Israel who condemned Goldstein and his ilk. The irony of extremists like Goldstein and Amir committing acts of murder to achieve their religious goals is precisely the undoing of a tradition and a society that puts the rule of law at the forefront, reasoned debate as its modus operandi and peaceful resolutions as its goal. Neither of these men could argue that either defenseless Muslim worshippers or a leader determined to negotiate a workable peace were a threat to Jewish lives.

The assassination of Rabin reverberated throughout the diplomatic world as a senseless loss of a great and distinguished leader, but it did not change the possibility of peace for Israel. That has always been in the hands of the Palestinian leadership, who have avoided constructive steps and positive attitudes to Israel that are the bare essentials for peace to become a reality.

The Palestinian Authority's current disapproval of Israel's normalisation of relations with Arab countries in the region is further proof that they do not want to give peace a chance.
“This is what Rabin would have wanted”: Israeli satire following the murder of Yitzhak Rabin

Ran Porat

“Tragedy plus time plus the will to be amused equals comedy” - Steve Allen

Every Israeli knows where they were and what they were doing when Yitzhak Rabin was murdered. On the night of 4 November 1995, my then-girlfriend (now wife) and I attended a show by the famous Israeli singer Danny Robas. I will never forget how Robas turned completely white when he was handed a note saying Rabin had been killed. “I can’t go on”, he said, and we all went home.

The following weeks were unrelentingly bleak and gloomy. Melancholy songs played on the radio, the TV broadcast sad ceremonies and memorials, along with documentaries about Rabin’s biography as a maverick soldier and politician.

Rabin was not famous for his sense of humour. If anything, he was short-tempered and grim. His slow, monotone speaking style was widely impersonated by comedians throughout his lifetime.

Time is, arguably, the best medicine—even for trauma. As the years passed, Israelis learnt to live with the new pain of Rabin’s untimely and unnatural death. Looking back, the gradual introduction of humour with regards to Rabin and his murder was a powerful tool in the ongoing—and still unfinished—healing process.

In fact, the themes and approaches taken by the various satirical TV programs that have dealt with the shock of that night constitute
a good barometer of the shift that has occurred in the perception of both Rabin as a person, and of his murder, within Israeli society.

Laughing at trauma is very Jewish. In the words of Woody Allen, “Life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering. And it’s all over much too soon”. Jewish history is often perceived as a long series of problems, pogroms and persecutions. In that context, humour is a powerful tool, letting us process and remember trauma in our collective consciousness, and heal from it. In It Kept Us Alive: Humor in the Holocaust (2014), Chaya Ostrower uncovered how Holocaust survivors used humour to keep them sane and alive, both in the midst of the most horrific period in human history, and in attempting to cope in its aftermath.

Israeli humour was born out of this survivalist Jewish humour, but has taken a step forward. “The world is funny, so we laugh”, in the cynical words of Hagashash Hahiver—The Pale Tracker—the legendary Israeli comedy trio, alluding to the Israeli perspective of the world as anything but funny.

From early days, Israeli humour had to tackle traumas of great magnitude. Feeling they own the Holocaust—it’s ‘their’ unique catastrophe to safeguard—Israelis are very careful not to joke about the murder of six million Jews. However, they certainly do land some heavy rhetorical punches when dealing with subjects tangential to it. One such angle is, for example, to highlight the way Israelis sometime use for their benefit the world’s guilt feelings—specifically in Germany—about allowing the Holocaust to happen. In one famous sketch, Israeli sports managers convince a German athletics umpire to give the Israeli runner a head start of a few meters. “Haven’t the Jewish people suffered enough?!” they scold the German.

On the other hand, all other topics and almost everyone else are fair game for ridicule. Almost no sacred cows have escaped the sharp knives of Israeli comedians.
Arie Sover argues that Israeli humour defines ‘the other’ in society in a very direct and political way, including laughing at war and conflict, which are an organic non-stop part of daily life in the Jewish state.

From one point of view of Jewish history, the murder of Rabin by Yigal Amir is not an exceptional event, but rather another link in a long chain of Jewish misery and misfortune. After all, in the ancient Hebrew kingdoms of the Bible, political killings were commonplace.

At the same time, Rabin’s death is idiosyncratic for two reasons. One, because it was the first political assassination to occur within the modern Jewish state. It was thus an Israeli event, separate from the wider Jewish historical context. The other factor that made it different is that it was actually very Jewish in the sense that division and partisanship have long been a major feature of Judaism. Rabin’s assassination saw Israelis learn—again—that the society of ‘New Jews’ created in Israel was far from the ideals painted by Israel’s founders—and had failed to avoid fatal internal conflicts, typical of many other nations, including the worst kinds of political violence.

And that’s exactly where Israeli humour came to the fore to address Rabin’s life and tragic death. Over the years since the murder, dozens of sketches and satirical shows have addressed the questions arising within the Israeli public following the trauma of that night in November 1995. Along with other factors, such as government policies and cultural and social debates, these sketches have rewritten what happened in the public’s conception of Israel’s history, as well as the lessons that can and should be learnt from Rabin’s life and murder.

Rabin-related satirical sketches that have featured on Israel’s TV channels can be divided into three main categories.
The first kind are those that participate in the hotly-debated and heavily-political question regarding Rabin’s legacy, and how he should be remembered as a person and a policy maker. Chartzufim (Israel’s version of the British satirical puppet show Spitting Image) was among the first to enter the ring. In a sketch broadcast on the second anniversary of his death, Rabin’s puppet begs, “Don’t be fanatics, do not make me into a martyr”.

On the 15th anniversary of Rabin’s death, the satirical right-wing TV show Latma presented a response to the political left’s claim that Rabin’s spiritual will was a continuation of the peace process. Fully aware that the killer was a product of the extreme political right, the sketch features a sorcerer speaking to Rabin’s spirit through a crystal ball. She condemns his murder but Rabin’s spirit then expresses what are now considered right-wing views (for example, on Jerusalem), based on statements he made during his lifetime, as if to say his legacy was not just aligned with the left.

A second type of Rabin-related humor came out of fear and pain—mostly from the political left—that Rabin, his murder and its significance would be forgotten. The satirical ensemble Hahamishia Hakamerit—Chamber Quintet—presented this warning on several occasions. In one example, a teenager calls a TV show to ask for help with writing an essay on the topic “Rabin’s murder: For and against”. The fictional teenager did not call to discuss the arguments, but rather to explain, “I don’t know who Rabin is.” In another sketch, Yigal Amir’s character cautions against impunity (“Twenty years from now, I will be pardoned. You know it deep in your heart that this will happen”).

The third type is a lighter humour, which becomes more common with the passage of time. Laughing at Rabin the man—and even at his murder—in a nonsensical and emotionally-liberating fashion, is now OK. Yet subtle criticisms about the values of current Israeli society are always present in these new sketches. The late Asi Dayan (son of Israel’s famous and controversial hero
Moshe Dayan) exhibited that attitude as early as 1998 with his short comedy *How to Cover Your Arse*. This was about a supporter of the left who uses pro-peace demonstrations and Rabin’s murder to hide his infidelity with a right-wing woman. The show *The Jews Are Coming* gently ridiculed Rabin by depicting him as a naïve politician, being led by Shimon Peres. A particularly wild sketch on the same show featured Amir and his family screaming “murder him” (or her) as a solution to every issue discussed around the dinner table.

Personally, as an Israeli, I will never forget the events of that dark night and what they meant to me. After 25 years, Israeli society has yet to fully heal from the killing of Rabin, but is in the process of doing so. As the characters in *The Jews Are Coming* sketch repeatedly proclaim, “That is what Rabin would have wanted”. I imagine he would have wanted us to have a bit of a laugh, even at his expense.
The Rabin oration

Omer Bar-Lev

I knew Yitzhak Rabin during three long periods of my life: The first, during his first term as prime minister when I was a young officer, and then when he was the defence minister and I was the commander of IDF’s elite unit Sayeret Matkal. The second was during his second term as prime minister and the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and then after with Jordan. The third was after his assassination, when I was leading Acharei, an NGO with its main purpose being to honour Rabin’s legacy.

The first period
July 1976, Rabin was prime minister and I was a team commander at Sayeret Matkal. An Air France plane that took off from Ben Gurion Airport to Paris was hijacked and re-routed to Entebbe, Uganda. On Saturday 3 July, we took off from Ben Gurion on four C-130 Hercules military aircraft to Entebbe. We landed there at approximately 11pm and, only 90 minutes later, it was I who was the last Israeli soldier on Ugandan soil that night, to get back into the fourth Hercules before taking off back home.

Several years ago, an event to mark the 40th anniversary of Operation Jonathan included the hostages and us, their rescuers, as well as Amos Eran, the director-general of the Prime Minister’s Office under Rabin. Amos gave us a peek into the drama on that Saturday morning before the Israeli cabinet approved the operation.

Rabin asked him to come to his private home at Ramat Aviv on Saturday at 7am.

He arrived there and saw Rabin pacing back and forth in his living room. An ashtray on the table filled with cigarette butts caught his eye and he understood that Rabin had been awake for the entire night.
Rabin told him that he had decided to approve the operation to rescue the Israeli and Jewish hostages in Entebbe and asked him to call for an immediate cabinet meeting. Rabin asked Amos to give every single one of the ministers the opportunity to say loud and clear whether they approved or rejected the operation and that he should insist on receiving a clear recommendation from each one of the ministers. He did not want anyone to hide in the shade.

But before Amos left, Rabin requested two additional things. First, to ask Haim Bar-Lev, who was at that time the Minister of Commerce and Industry, to speak first and give his recommendation. Haim was my father, and Rabin knew that he was aware that I was supposed to be one of the team commanders in the raid.

Rabin also knew that all other ministers were aware of this as well. And he assumed that if my father approved the operation, all of the other ministers would approve it as well. And so it was!

But Rabin had another request for Amos. “Prepare a resignation letter that I will hand to the President if the operation fails”. Amos asked him, “what would you consider a failure?” Rabin replied, “If we return with 20 coffins”.

To conclude this story, there were many heroes during that operation. Due to their courage, the rescue in Entebbe was a success. But each one of them knew that there was someone above them with a wider responsibility.

However, there was no one above Rabin. He knew that if he would approve the operation he would have to take full responsibility—not only for success but also for failure, if it were to happen. And so he did.

Fortunately, it was a success even though, sadly, we came back with the body of our unit commander, Yoni Netanyahu (of blessed memory).
Three months later, as a commander of a special operation, I was about to mount with my team on five helicopters that had just landed at our base to take us far beyond enemy lines. The helicopter’s rotors were roaring wildly and, as we were about to climb in, I saw an official car approaching. It stopped just under the first helicopter’s rotor and Prime Minister Rabin got out. This was not the place for a dramatic speech (which none of us would have been able to hear, anyway!)

Rabin approached each one of the soldiers, shook their hand firmly, and finally approached me. He looked deep into my eyes. There was no need for any words; I felt clearly what he wanted to say:

It’s going to be dangerous and risky but I, the Prime Minister of Israel on behalf of all citizens who will never know where you are heading to or the importance of your mission to Israel’s security, want to thank you on behalf of all of them and wish you good luck.

This was a true leader and a human being.

Eight years later, when Rabin was Israel’s defence minister in the unity government led by Yitzhak Shamir and Shimon Peres, I was the commander of Sayeret Matkal. For three years—believe me! Three very long years, including long nights that sometimes never ended and sometimes ended too soon—from 1984 to 1987, I met with him almost every second week while presenting each and every operation beyond enemy lines for his approval. He was always sharp, clear, precise and, most of all, inspiring.

The second period
The second period began six years later, in 1993 with the Oslo accords, which were signed while Rabin was prime minister and I a brigade commander. Due to my academic background and, more specifically, due to the book I wrote a couple of years earlier that dealt with potential security arrangements in the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria, I was asked to take part in the IDF’s
committee that negotiated with the Palestinians on the first agreement. Several months later, I also took part in the negotiations with the Jordanians on the peace agreement with them.

I had many hours with Prime Minister Rabin, in most of them I could see, even feel, the enormous weight of responsibility that was lying on his shoulders. I saw him moving back and forth, sometimes even swinging from hesitation to decision, grappling with what might be the right move for Israel's security and our future. He saw the many obstacles that were ahead, as well as the opportunity. But once he made a decision it was clear for all.

After the peace agreement with Jordan was signed, I decided to complete my service in the IDF and retire.

Several months later, I was asked to fly to the US and meet with a number of Jewish communities and present to them the agreements that were signed with the Palestinians and Jordan. My first speech was on the morning of 4 November 1995, at one of the synagogues in New York. A couple of hours later, Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated.

What shocks me even today is that once I was informed about the assassination—and before I even knew who the assassin was—it was obvious to me that it wasn’t a Palestinian terrorist, but an Israeli citizen. The polarisation and hatred within Israeli society was at that time wide and dangerous. Unfortunately, it has only got worst ever since.

The third period
A short time after Rabin’s assassination, a group of young Israelis in their 20s decided that they had a responsibility to honour and continue Rabin’s legacy. They called themselves Dor Shalom—Generation of Peace. In the beginning, they felt that they should focus only on the part of Rabin’s legacy that dealt with security and peace. Not too long after, they realised that Rabin’s legacy should
stand on the two pillars of Rabin’s prime ministership. Aside from security and peace, the second pillar should relate to Rabin’s efforts to close the gaps within our society, mainly focusing on education and social economic issues.

At that time, I was a volunteer in this NGO and was approached by one of the leaders of the group with the idea of establishing a group of teenagers from one of Tel Aviv’s low socio-economic suburbs, and prepare them for their mandatory military service. From Israel’s independence until today, there is a common understanding that the mandatory service in the IDF is a melting pot of Israeli society. Youngsters drafted from all over the country have the opportunity to meet and get to know each other.

The purpose of the new initiative was to give these youngsters from Israel’s periphery—whether geographic or socio-economic—a better opportunity to integrate into our society and even lead by completing a meaningful service in the IDF. We called this movement ‘Acharei’, which is the Israeli commander’s call in the battlefield to his soldiers—Follow me! Not ‘move ahead’ or other calls, but follow me—meaning ‘see what I’m doing and how I lead and do the same; follow my call’.

We began with one small group with a dozen teenagers—boys and girls from one of Tel Aviv’s suburbs and, within a year, we grew to five groups. Within 15 years, Acharei had become the biggest NGO for teenagers, with 200 groups from all over Israel covering all the different facets of Israeli society, including groups of Druze, Bedouins, and even ultra-Orthodox youngsters.

In September this year, Israel—led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—signed peace agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Two important peace agreements with two Arab states. One more step towards Rabin’s hope that Israel will live in peace with all of our neighbours. A step that perhaps would never have happened if, in his time, Rabin didn’t make the first difficult move towards the Palestinians and Jordanians.
The late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s legacy is still with us: The will to live in peace with our neighbours, to narrow the gaps within Israeli society, and the dream that Israel will become an exemplary state as our prophets in the Bible destined for us.

May his memory be forever blessed.
One desert, two communities of women

Hagar Baram

Yitzhak Rabin signed, with Jordan’s King Hussein, a treaty of peace with Jordan on 26 October 1994. It was only the second ratified peace treaty Israel signed with an Arab state. To the Israeli and Jordanian communities of the Arava—the wide valley connecting the Dead Sea with Eilat—the treaty held a promise of trade, tourism and cross-cultural cooperation. But this potential was left begging until a group of women from the Israeli Arava took it upon themselves to meet with their Jordanian counterparts and explore the arts and crafts that united them. The result? Regular meetings, a cooperative business venture and cross-border tourism.

Their story has special meaning for the Australian Jewish community because of the Arava Australia Partnership. Since 1995, Australia has partnered with the Central Arava Region through Partnership 2Gether (P2G), a program akin to a sister city relationship. Created by the Jewish Agency for Israel, P2G aims to connect communities in the Diaspora with regions in Israel through unique people-to-people activities.

In December 2018, five women from the Central Arava visited Jordan to look for partners for joint meetings on handicrafts. Most of us had never been to Jordan previously, despite living only a few hundred metres from the border. Jordanians seemed to us like distant and insurmountable riddles. We left the Arava with the hope of finding women who would agree to meet and talk to us.

In Jordan—particularly in the peripheral areas—the cooperative model is common among women. Groups of 10 to 15 women work together on clay, beads, botanical dyeing, mosaics and more.
We visited various cooperatives in an attempt to find potential partners. These encounters were both exciting and somewhat alarming. We were led into side rooms in remote villages, where we met with women covered from head to toe, women for whom these were their first ever encounters with Israeli women. It was very difficult to break the ice; both sides came with a great deal of apprehension and memories of war and hostility. But once the fabrics, thread and spools of wool were deployed and the handicrafts brought out, conversation began to flow, with each side admiring the other’s skills. Both sides found that they had a great deal in common.

After this visit, a core group of five Jordanian and Israeli women was formed. These women served as ambassadors with a new message to the villages in Israel and in Jordan. They found additional women and artists with the courage to come and visit the other side of the border. Bless Your Hands was born.

Twenty Israeli and 20 Jordanian women subsequently participated in seminars on women’s crafts. Despite a common language (aside from a small amount of English), miracles began to happen in the landscape of the desert wilderness. We worked in mixed groups: a Jordanian master weaver with a graduate of the Shenkar College of Design, a jeweller from Israel with a Jordanian creator of Muslim prayer necklaces, clay and indigo, graduates with academic training together with experts in traditional crafts. The groups touched upon the entire range of arts practiced by the women. The practice of ancient crafts and skills became a laboratory for new creations, in an electrifying atmosphere of artistic inspiration, working without language or borders.

In the Israeli Arava, there are artists who engage in wet felting, a craft that originated in Russia and the northern European countries. Wet felting is a minimalist technique that requires small amounts of wool, water and natural soap. The Jordanian women are well versed in the rich wool culture that hails from the East, and have
in-depth knowledge of various woollen crafts, which are considered female desert-craft, passed down the generations. However, while the Jordanian women are extremely skilled in spinning, weaving, knitting and wool processing, they were not familiar with the craft of felting.

They looked at this new craft and could not believe their eyes. Wool, which is a key element in their lives, had revealed a new face to them. The women explained that, in Jordan, wool is one of the most problematic causes of environmental pollution. Due to the substantial number of herds in Jordan, large amounts of excess wool are dumped in rivers, streets and open waterways at the end of the shearing season. The wool piles up on roadsides, pollutes rivers, blows into houses and agricultural irrigation ponds, and is a great source of annoyance to the residents. We understood that this excess wool is actually an available raw material which is abundant in Jordan, and that there is a real social and environmental need to find another use for it. From the conversations and brainstorming, the idea arose to create a joint product, one which begins production in Jordan and ends in Israel, which has passed through both Jordanian and Israeli hands and crosses geographical and internal borders, a product born of the raw materials of the desert: women, wool, plants, and living water.

The Jordanian women collect the wool from the surrounding rivers, clean it and then felt it into lengths of wool material of various sizes. The material is then sent to Israel, where Israeli women collect leaves, branches, pods and flowers from local willow trees, which they botanically print on the lengths of wool. Our guiding principle is to ensure that the products are made from the raw materials around us, without the use of chemicals, out of concern for the environment and due to the environmental challenges of our time. The result of the process is a beautiful mural, made of 100 per cent wild natural wool, each with a unique botanical print. An online store showcasing the jointly-produced prints, as well as
the additional projects in development by the initiative, has been established. The joint project was good, but not enough. We wanted to open up a road and a border crossing, and link the same ancient roads that once connected East and West. We have created tour packages for women from all over the world; five-day trips during which we meet with women in the Jordanian Arava, visit the local sites, cooperatives and various women’s initiatives, are hosted in community kitchens and visit the homes of the village elders. The trip then crosses the border to visit the women of the Israeli Arava, hear the story of the Arava and learn the secrets of its establishment. One desert, two communities of women and the new bridge being built between them.

In the beginning it was difficult to find Jordanian women who would agree to meet with Israeli women, as there is much resistance to normalisation of relations with Israel, particularly in the remote rural communities. As time went on and the Jordanian women visited Israel and personal encounters between the women turned into friendships, as well as the hope of establishing a joint business, new foundations were created in both Israeli and Jordanian communities. More and more women began to join the meetings and the Jordanians who returned after being hosted in Israel admitted that everything they had heard or thought about Israel was different from what they saw: “I thought you were all soldiers with weapons”, “I feel like someone pulled me out of a grave”. They explained that in their villages, “Anyone who cooperates with Israel is called a traitor.” “I am going to tell everyone how nice it is in Israel and what lovely, good women there are”.

For the Israeli women, who live in a male-oriented agricultural region, the meeting with the Jordanians inspired other women’s groups.

The Israeli–Jordanian border is defined as a quiet border, with few security incidents, but quiet is not always a blessing. For 25 years, very few joint projects have sprung up, and the people on
both sides, who are less than a ten-minute drive away from each other, had never met. In the meantime, mines, fears, alienation and disconnection have filled the void. Bless Your Hands is the first seed of a new opportunity in the Arava.

Working together, shoulder-to-shoulder, full of creative joy, solving difficulties within the artistic process, cooking together, hosting each other, telling stories of birth and death, stories about husbands, mothers and children. Without knowing Hebrew or Arabic, but with a sense that a strong bond of friendship has been forged in working together for our future and for the future of our children.

October 2019 marked 25 years since the historic peace agreement between Israel and Jordan was signed; no state ceremonies in either Israel or Jordan were held to mark the anniversary, but on that weekend we hosted a delegation of Jordanian women in the Israeli Arava. We sat together in a circle under an acacia tree, knowing that nothing official would mark the day, no peace ceremony between the two countries would take place, and yet there we were: sitting together, dreaming and working together on this anniversary. Peace in action. A legacy of Rabin.
Rethinking my Zionism
Simone Szalmuk-Singer

The death of a public figure usually affects me in a distant way. My interest may be piqued for a day or two, eventually becoming just another news story fading into the background of everyday life. However, the death of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin very literally changed the course of my life and that of my family, my relationship with Israel and my leadership.

Rabin’s assassination on 4 November 1995 was a pivotal moment in history. The extent and nature of its impact on Israel’s security, society and the peace process has been the subject of much conjecture. Twenty-five years later, the effects are still complex, enduring and fiercely debated.

Whilst the macro impact of Rabin’s death is reflected in policy decisions and public discourse, it is also evident in millions of micro impacts in Israel and around the world. In fact, sometimes the macro can be more deeply understood if we look through the lens of individuals and families. In this context, I share my very personal experience of how Rabin’s assassination affected my life.

Back in 1995, I was a young lawyer working at a large Melbourne law firm. My husband and I were both very Zionist and planned to move to Israel, to make aliyah. We were grappling with various aspects of the decision, including leaving careers that were on good trajectories and moving away from ageing parents. Our deliberations were mostly about ‘when’ we should leave, not, ‘if’ we should go at all.

Our intention to move to Israel instantly evaporated with the shot of Yigal Amir’s weapon. Rabin’s assassination metaphorically winded me; I simply could no longer see the logic in making sacrifices for an ideology that appeared suddenly broken.
The shocking realisation that Rabin was assassinated by a fellow Jew struck deep in what could be termed my ‘naïve’ Zionism.

My ideological beliefs emanated from a combination of my upbringing and Jewish day school education. My late father, George Szalmuk, was one of the ma’apilim—illegal immigrants—who, in March 1947, crossed post-war Europe to reach Israel illegally on a converted cattle transport ship called Moledet—Homeland. Caught by the British, my father, his brother Mordechai and Mordechai’s wife Pesia were interned in Cyprus. In the detention camps, my father trained in the underground Haganah. On his third escape attempt from Cyprus, my father successfully travelled to Israel on a small fishing boat in the dark of night with 20 others. They landed on the shores of Israel near Netanya. It was October 1948 and the War of Independence was raging. My father headed straight to the Palmach base Machaneh Yona. The Palmach was the elite fighting unit of the emerging Israeli army. Whenever recounting his story, my father would always proudly emphasise that the great Israeli heroes such as Rabin fought in the Palmach. My father fought in the Yiftach Brigade involved in dangerous missions such as Operation Yoav, an operation to free the Negev from Egyptian forces and to connect it with the rest of the Jewish state. He fought until his tank hit an anti-tank mine. He awoke from a coma to learn that he was the only soldier in the tank to survive.

Uncle Mordechai was a colonel in the Israel Defence Force. My earliest memories of visiting Israel were of being greeted by Uncle Mordechai in uniform at passport control—with a rank of colonel, Mordechai was permitted to enter the restricted arrivals area of the airport and was treated with the utmost respect everywhere he went. I learnt to ride a bicycle on the Ramat David Airforce base where my cousins lived. Their father was a pilot whose plane had been hit twice during the Yom Kippur War. He had still managed to land it, in order to save the precious aircraft.
As a child of survivors, I grew up hearing gruelling stories of survival from Auschwitz, Siberia and Cyprus, and heroic stories of my family’s military bravery in Israel’s many wars. I felt proudest and safest in Israel and could never quite understand why my parents chose to live in Australia after all they had experienced.

Throughout my schooling, the narrative about the establishment of the modern State of Israel was very black and white—there were those who were indisputably right and those who were wrong. The only glimpses of grey were discussions I had with my father about the details of the War of Independence and his stories of battle. At university, against the backdrop of the intifada, I became more aware of the complexities of war but I was still fiercely supportive of Israel and proudly viewed Israel as an exemplar of democracy—‘the only democracy in the Middle East’.

And then Rabin was shot. My idyllic picture of Israel vanished.

Ironically, the words of Rabin’s final speech that fateful night spoke exactly to that picture:

> Violence is undermining the very foundations of Israeli democracy. It must be condemned, denounced and isolated. This is not the way of the State of Israel. Controversies may arise in a democracy, but the decision must be reached through democratic elections...

On the night of 4 November 1995, in the centre of Tel Aviv, the principles of democracy were deposed by the gun.

I attended the Melbourne communal memorial service for Rabin. I listened and I cried as if I had lost a close friend or family member. I cried for Rabin and for what I felt Israel had become.

Our plans to move to Israel were shelved and our lives were built in Melbourne. So strong was my reactive disillusionment that I barely travelled to Israel for a decade and refrained from engaging with
Israel through Jewish community events. My only connection was with my Israeli family, Israeli literature and music.

As the years passed, time healed, I matured and gradually became adept at living with a more complex, more real, Israel. When I started visiting again with my young children I felt a connection and pull as strong as ever. But now my eyes were wide open. My father had always espoused the view that one should not criticise Israel unless one lives there. This view was also commonly shared by the Australian Jewish communal establishment. However, as Israel was no longer a fledgling state where its very existence was in question, I found that my connection to Israel only grew deeper and more meaningful through discussion and debate about the country’s politics, policies and society. Learning about the real—rather than idyllic—Israel strengthened the prominence of Israel as the core of my Jewish identity.

I sought and found where I could engage with and contribute to Israel in a valuable way whilst not living there. I spent many years in the leadership of JNF Australia, helping to build bilateral relationships between Australian and Israeli urban water experts and researchers, as well as develop and grow partnerships between communities in Israel and Australia. I was committed to providing younger generations of Australian Jews with a meaningful vehicle and narrative through which they could engage with Israel.

My philanthropy and leadership remain strongly focused on building partnerships between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. My own visceral experience of Rabin’s assassination continues to inform the way I seek to strengthen that partnership. I firmly believe that Israel and Diaspora Jewry are in a symbiotic relationship in which we are each stronger because of the other. In order to secure that relationship in today’s world, we need to accept each other’s differences and reconcile ourselves with the existence of imperfections, all the while striving to improve. At the same time, we need to make space to discuss, debate and learn to understand our respective challenges and find ways to hear each other.
Rabin’s death was the monumental event to which I reacted by locating my life and that of my family in Australia, rather than Israel. It was the event that removed my rose-coloured glasses and forced me to see the real Israel comprised of both a multitude of challenges and brilliant achievements. As a consequence, I hold an unconditional commitment to Israel and have spent many years working on that commitment and leading others to do so. Rabin himself was a leader who, in the opinion of some, embodied the contradictions of being the brave Israeli warrior on one hand and leading peace, on the other. Twenty-five years later, as the soul of Israel is arguably being challenged now more than ever by intense polarisation in all its parts, ironically, the aftermath of Rabin’s assassination equipped me with the tools I need to preserve that commitment.
Three shots

Ginette Searle

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.
About the authors

Sapir Atias
Sapir Atias is the Jewish Agency’s Israeli shlicha for Hashomer Hatzair (Hashy) and Aliyah in Melbourne. She holds a BA in international social work and a teaching diploma in English. She worked as an educator for many years with at-risk youth in different organisations, and as a team manager in charge of training for new employees at a hi-tech company. As a social worker, she also worked with the elderly and new olim. Sapir spent most of her high school years writing for a co-existence magazine, and was a commander and a hadracha instructor in her army service.

Hagar Baram
Hagar Baram is the leader of the Bless Your Hands initiative in Israel. A resident of Moshav Idan in the Central Arava, she holds a bachelor’s degree in education and literature and a master’s degree in folklore studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. For the past ten years she has been teaching spoken Arabic at the Anthroposophy School in the Arava.

(Photo credit: Avishag Shear Yashuv)
Omer Bar-Lev
Omer Bar-Lev served as the commander of the IDF’s special forces, and later in the IDF’s delegation for negotiations with the PLO and Jordan. After the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, he initiated and founded Acharei, whose mission is to empower Israeli youth in the periphery, and strengthen their involvement and empathy to the democratic and Zionist values. Acharei is now one of the most successful Israeli youth organisations. Omer has also enjoyed a long career in the Israeli hi-tech industry, mainly in the medical and defence fields, and was a Labour MK in the 19th, 20th and 22nd Knessets.

Rinat Kedem Bart
Rinat Kedem Bart was the Jewish Agency’s representative for Australia and New Zealand during 2014–2018, and has worked for the Jewish Agency on many short term shlichuyot around the world. She held several positions in the social and public sectors in Israel, functioned as the CEO of the Jerusalem Rape Crisis Centre, a criminal prosecutor and as the CEO of the Israel Centre on Addiction. She holds a master’s (LLM) in international and civil law from Tel Aviv University and Northwestern University in Chicago, and an LLB from Hebrew University. Rinat was born and raised in Jerusalem, and experienced life in Australia as a child due to her parent’s shlichut in Adelaide.
Bren Carlill
Dr Bren Carlill is the director of public affairs at the Zionist Federation of Australia. In previous roles he worked at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as an advisor to a federal MP and at the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council. Bren's *The Challenges of Resolving the Israeli–Palestinian Dispute: An impossible peace?* will be released by Palgrave Macmillan in February 2021.

Greer Fay Cashman
Greer Fay Cashman was born in Australia to Polish immigrant parents. She was a member of Habonim from an early age, and later joined Bnei Akiva. At school, she edited the school magazine, and later worked for the Jewish News and the Jewish Herald. In 1971, she moved to Sydney, where she edited the Sydney Jewish News, which was later merged into the Australian Jewish News. In 1973, she moved to Israel, and covered the Yom Kippur War on both the northern and southern fronts for the Jewish News and the American Jewish Press Association. She began writing for the *Jerusalem Post* in 1975 and continues to do so. She covers the president and has a regular column called Grapevine, which appears in the daily paper three times a week and on Fridays in the paper’s local supplement In Jerusalem. Grapevine had its origins in the *Australian Jewish News*.

(Photo credit: Mark Israel Sellem)
Jack Chrapot
Jack Chrapot recently retired after a long career in a suburban legal practice. His involvement as a Zionist goes back to his youth as a member of Habonim. More recently, he represented Ameinu on the executive of Zionism Victoria and is currently on the Arava Australia Partnership board. Jack has a long history of communal work for several organisations and takes particular pride in his work for the Prahran Mission Development Council, which entailed fundraising and bringing affordable legal services for people with mental health issues, and to the unemployed and the homeless.

Mark Dreyfus
Mark Dreyfus QC MP was elected to federal parliament in 2007 as the Member for Isaacs. After serving as Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, in 2013 Mark was sworn in as Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Management and, later, as Minister for the Public Service and Special Minister of State. Mark’s first career was as a lawyer and barrister. A former director of the Law Council of Australia, Mark was appointed Queen’s Counsel in 1999. Mark is a strong advocate for social justice and believes in creating a sustainable economy and environment for future generations. He is also a passionate defender of the rule of law and, over recent years, has been advocating for the establishment of a powerful and independent national anti-corruption commission.
Emily Gian
In 2002, at 18 years of age, Emily Gian travelled solo to Israel in what turned out to be the height of the second intifada, when suicide bombers were operating and attacks on civilians were becoming a regular part of Israeli life. Spurred on by the enormous disparity between what was happening in front of her eyes and what was being reported in many parts of the international media, she began working for Zionism Victoria where she monitored the local media. She worked there for nine years before commencing with the Zionist Federation of Australia in 2013, where she is Communications Director. A lover of all things Israeli, including food, music and popular culture, Emily speaks fluent Hebrew and holds a BA with Honours from the University of Melbourne, where she majored in history and Jewish studies.

Yael Grunseit
Yael Grunseit is the Federal Rosh Chinuch (Head of Education) of Habonim Dror Australia. In 2020, Yael has focused on increasing the movement’s engagement in its progressive Zionist identity. She is a Dalyell Scholar studying a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Sydney, majoring in philosophy. She is an informal Jewish life educator at Emanuel School. In this position Yael collaborates with the Jewish life staff to increase student engagement with Judaism through innovative educational methods.
James Kennard
Rabbi James Kennard has been principal of Mount Scopus Memorial College in Melbourne since 2007. Born in the UK and having studied at Oxford University and yeshivot in Israel, he has served in a variety of Jewish educational roles, including being principal of two schools before coming to Australia. James is a popular speaker and writer.

Rachael Kohn
Dr Rachael Kohn taught religious studies and Semitic studies at Sydney University before joining the ABC, where she produced and presented programs on religion for 26 years, including The Spirit of Things, from 1997 to 2018. Her award-winning work, including on the Dead Sea Scrolls, was internationally acclaimed. She is the author of many works, including The New Believers: Reimagining God (2003) and Curious Obsessions in the History of Science and Spirituality (2007; Rev. 2020). In 2005, the University of New South Wales awarded her a Doctor of Letters honoris causa. In 2019, she was awarded the Order of Australia for contributions to broadcasting and Jewish studies, and was also made a fellow of the Royal Society of NSW.
Ruth Lacey
Ruth Lacey is a writer and visual artist who grew up in Sydney and lives in a small kibbutz in the Galilee. She holds an arts/law degree from Melbourne University and an MPhil in creative writing from the USW in Wales. Ruth has worked in Israel as a legal advisor, community manager, and journal editor. Her short fiction has appeared in Litro Magazine, Fish Anthology, Carve Magazine, Overland and other journals, and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. Her articles about kibbutz have appeared in the English-language Jewish press. She is currently working on a short story collection.

Jeremy Leibler
Jeremy Leibler is president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, and deputy chair of Leibler Yavneh College, a modern Orthodox day school in Melbourne with over 750 students. He is also a partner at Arnold Bloch Leibler, practising in mergers and acquisitions, a non-executive director of Thorney Technologies, and a member of the Australian Takeovers Panel.
Mark Leibler AC is senior partner at Arnold Bloch Leibler and head of the firm’s renowned taxation practice. Mark’s leadership in the law has interconnected with his leadership of the Australian Jewish community, where he has led both Australian and international Jewish bodies. He is national chairman of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, life chairman of the United Israel Appeal of Australia, and governor of the Australia–Israel Chamber of Commerce. He also serves on the executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel, and as a governor of Tel Aviv University. Mark is also recognised and respected for his profound contribution to Indigenous rights and reconciliation.

Sam Lipski AO, BA, LLD (HON) is a Pratt Foundation Trustee and former CEO (1998–2019). As an award-winning journalist, he served as foreign editor of The Bulletin, executive producer for Four Corners, Washington correspondent for The Australian and Jerusalem Post, foreign affairs commentator for the Channel Nine Network, editor-in-chief of the Australian Jewish News and founding publisher of the Jerusalem Report. Sam’s community roles have included being president of the State Library of Victoria, chair of the advisory board at Melbourne University’s Centre for Advanced Journalism, and chair of the advisory board at Monash University’s Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation. Sam’s book Let My People Go: The untold story of Australia and the Soviet Jews 1959–1989, written with Suzanne Rutland, shared the 2016 Prime Minister’s Literary Award for Australian History.
Michael Manhaim
Michael Manhaim is currently serving as shaliach of the Hatzofim—Israeli Scouts—and as Hatzofim and Garin Tzabar Australia Executive Director. Before arriving in Australia, Michael worked as a vice director of Poland Youth Delegations of Hatzofim. Previously, he worked as an educational director for three years. Prior to his shlichut, Michael was part of several initiatives in the field of public diplomacy, connecting people through culture and was an LGBTQI activist. He holds a BA in government, diplomacy and strategy from IDC Herzliya, specialising in the field of public diplomacy. He started his shlichut in November 2018. Michael is in Sydney with his partner Shai, a long way from their home in the centre of Tel Aviv.

David Mittelberg
Prof David Mittelberg currently serves as research fellow at the Research Authority, Oranim Academic College of Education and as an affiliate at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University, as well as a senior research fellow at the Institute for Kibbutz Research, at the University of Haifa. David is the author of four books and numerous published articles on ethnicity, migration, gender, tourism, kibbutz education, Jewish peoplehood education, and the sociology of Diaspora Jewry. David is married to Shoshana with three children and four grandchildren and, since his aliyah from Melbourne in 1972, has been a member of Kibbutz Yizreel.
**Ran Porat**
Dr Ran Porat is a research associate at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, at Monash University, and an expert on the Israeli diaspora in Australia (‘Ausraelis’). Ran also teaches on the Middle East and Israel at Melbourne University and previously at Monash University. A published analyst on the Middle East and Israel, he is a research fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Centre, Herzliya and a research associate at Future Directions International Research Institute, Western Australia.

**Alex Ryvchin**
Alex Ryvchin is co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and the author of two internationally acclaimed books of history and politics, The Anti-Israel Agenda: Inside the political war on the Jewish state and Zionism: The concise history. He writes for leading publications and speaks and teaches around the world on the Arab–Israeli conflict, foreign and national affairs, antisemitism and the Holocaust, and is a regular commentator on TV and radio. Prior to joining the ECAJ, he worked for a member of the state legislature as a researcher and speechwriter before practising law in Sydney and London.
Ginette Searle
Ginette Searle is the CEO of the Zionist Federation of Australia and has worked in senior management roles in Australian Jewish and Zionist organisations since 2001. As CEO, she oversees the entire range of projects and activities undertaken by the ZFA, including Israel advocacy and community engagement, sending young adults on short and long Israel programs, fostering future Jewish community leadership, facilitating aliyah, and a range of educational and cultural initiatives, all designed to foster the relationship between Australia and Israel at multiple levels. A committed advocate and activist for Israel and committed to building and maintaining a strong, Zionist Jewish community in Australia, her work enables her to fulfil her personal passions as a professional.

Jillian Segal
Jillian Segal AO is president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and chair of the Australia–Israel Chamber of Commerce (NSW). She is a professional company director with a legal and regulatory background and private and public sector experience. Currently, she is a director of Rabobank Australia, chair of the General Sir John Monash Foundation and chair of the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA). Jillian is on the board of the Garvan Institute of Medical Research; she is a director of the Grattan Institute and a trustee of the Sydney Opera House Trust. Previously, she was a director of ASX Ltd and National Australia Bank Ltd and a member of the federal government’s Remuneration Tribunal.
Tibor Shalev-Schlosser
His Excellency Dr Tibor Shalev-Schlosser is interim Israeli ambassador to Australia. Since 2016, he has been the Israeli ambassador to the Pacific island states. Previous to this role, Tibor was Israel’s envoy for Holocaust issues and restitution. In 2011, he opened the Israeli consulate-general in Munich for southern Germany and served as consul-general until 2013. He has also served as the deputy head of mission at Israel’s mission to the UN in Geneva, the director of the International Organisations Department in Israel’s foreign ministry, and as a diplomat in Rome and Berlin. Tibor has academic degrees in philosophy, history, and political science, as well as being a qualified Israeli tour guide. He is fluent in six languages.

Noa Shaul
Noa Shaul, or Noosh, as she is known in the Jewish community, is a madricha and the executive officer of the Australasian Zionist Youth Council (AZYC). Attending a public school, she found her way into the Jewish community by attending weekly peulot at Habonim Dror. After returning from shnat, she was a madricha in Habonim Dror, and held leadership positions including as state and federal mazkira. In 2019, she was the AZYC chairperson and struggled to leave the youth movement world so much that she returned to become AZYC executive officer in 2020. She is passionate about child safety, pretzel M&Ms and her dog, Clara.
Simone Szalmuk-Singer
Simone Szalmuk-Singer is motivated by a strong sense of service to the Jewish community and holds several leadership positions. She is co-vice president of Jewish Care Victoria, co-chair of the Australian Jewish Funders, director of the Erdi Foundation and co-founder of Jewish Women of Words. Simone was formerly president of JNF Victoria and Australian national vice president. She is passionate about developing Jewish communal leadership and is a mentor in several leadership programs, a senior fellow in the Schusterman Fellowship program and a member of the of the Schusterman Foundation Senior Fellows Advisory Committee. For many years, Simone worked as a lawyer.
A man of honour

When Yitzhak Rabin was cut down on 4 November 1995, the shock was felt around the world. In this book, created to mark the 25th anniversary of his assassination, Australians and Israelis with a connection to Australia reflect on the life and legacy of Rabin, and how the assassination changed them personally, changed their community and changed Israel.

Some contributors to this book knew Rabin personally. Others were born only after he died. Some have a long history in the Labor movement, others come from different political persuasions. Some are religious, others not. But all were profoundly affected by the example of Rabin’s life and the lessons of his death, and all are united in understanding the importance of finding the middle ground, rejecting extremism of any kind, and implementing in their lives the examples Rabin provided.

Community leaders, academics, rabbis, youth movement activists, shlichim and philanthropists provide an insight into Rabin’s life, his decision-making, his sense of honour and mission, and into the impact on their personal and collective Zionism when a Jewish assassin murdered the leader of the Jewish state.