

Eulogy for Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin

Stern College for Women -- November 6, 1995

1. In Halakha--difference between ואיננות ואבילות--disbelief/onset of pain...
A this very hour/Jerus/being led to קבורה; & we--still in state of shock,
& just beginning to feel full impact of grief.

So--is too early to take full measure of man, just enough for expression
of initial grief and the bare beginnings of assessment of R. for us/history

2. Begin with an interpretation of this past Shabbat's Sidra: לך לך מארצך
וממולדתך ומבית אביך...אבות פ"ה--עשרה נסיונות...ורמב"ם-א' מהן "לך לך".
אבל קשה--רש"י --"לטובתך ולהנאתך"....אלא שהנסיון היה שאברהם הבחין בצער הנשאים....

So: his passing--no matter which side of the political divide we stand on--leaves
us bewildered, grief-stricken, deeply vexed.

3. אבילות contains within it an element of תשובה...It is therefore appropriate for us
to examine ourselves & learn if we in any way can improve what we are
doing/how acting so as to avoid such catastrophes in future

4. Let me begin these few ruminations by saying that in addition to shock and
grief, I for one experienced a vital element of תשובה, and that is: בוש...

It was one of us--a religious student, who did it--even if he is a mad man...

5. We have been civilized--by Torah, by social sanctions, by parental training,
by moral conscience. That constraining inhibition is powerful in most people. I
But in some it is exceedingly weak. A person so poorly endowed can lead an
otherwise normal life for a long time, but place him in an environment which is
permissive of violence, which exposes him to harsh talk, to hype, to unrestrained
overstatement, to irrational and undisciplined expression--and anti-social urges
buried deep within his sick psyche will explode in an unspeakably ugly display of
hostility that turns men into monsters, society into a jungle, and civilization into
chaos.

Our responsibility is to avoid such an environment, never to be guilty of having,
knowingly or unknowingly, encouraged such bestiality.

Our responsibility is to be responsible, to recognize that violent rhetoric
invariably leads to violent deeds. In the absence of such awareness, we stand
accused of having prepared the ground for the explosion of such malevolence by

people of weak restraint, like a sewer blowing its cover and uncontrollably spewing forth its odious and miasmic gases.

Let us never again, in Jerusalem or in New York, call a respected leader of Israel a "traitor." And let us silence those raucous voices of vicious discord who declare that it is a מצוה to assassinate a Prime Minister of the State of Israel!

Remember what King Solomon taught: והחיים ביד הלשון--words can bring joy and enhance life; and words--oral or written--can also hurt/maim/destroy/kill.

6. I want to make it clear: *Nothing in what I say should be construed as approving or disapproving of the Rabin policies; condemning or condoning statements he may have made.* That is precisely the point that I wish to make: We must deplore what a man says--which we may find hateful--but never must we denigrate the צלם אלקים which confers upon him his basic human dignity. We may oppose, however strongly, the policy, but not savage the personality. That is not the way of any morally mature and responsible, sensitive human being, and certainly not the way of בני תורה.

7. The murder of YR should put all of us on notice:

Tone down irresponsible rhetoric.

And keep far away from that arrogant self-righteousness that persuades us that our ideals are greater and better than the other fellow's; that we are sincere and he is not; that we are unquestionably right and he is always wrong; that we are therefore entitled to force him--by "eliminating" him if need be, in order to have our "truth" prevail.

We must here develop a new sensitivity to extremism of all kinds. When I argue against uncivil speech, it is not a matter of taste or literary style. *Le style c'est l'homme*. Style often reveals character. We have allowed ourselves too often the luxury of extremist expression, and we must all band together to learn how to avoid it--whether by young or old.

of extremist uncivil speech, etc.

8. I return to the object of our grief, to YR. He was not an observant Jew, not a שומר מצוות. Perhaps if we had his upbringing, we would be no better--and if he had ours, he might easily outshine us... But he was a great man--whether or not you agreed with him--and his place in Jewish history is assured.

R. Hayyim Vital teaches that there are 2 different levels of soul--נפש ורוח--and that one may possess one or both. If one is helpful to his fellow humans and devoted to people and his land, he possesses a higher degree of נפש than one who spends his life in Torah and mitzvot but fails to serve his fellow Jews and "א"; whereas the latter possess רוח which the former does not.

noble
I am in no position to judge the quality of YR's רוח. But I can tell you this: he had ~~an exquisite~~ נפש. His life was spent on behalf of his people and his country. His נפש was one of indomitable courage, of bravery in war and peace, of genuine heroism on the battle-front and in the chancelleries of the world. He laid down his life on the מזבח of שלום. And שלום is a Name of 'ה--not a political policy that we are commanded to look upon with suspicion... *if safe*

9. In Iran there is celebration. In Lebanon there is dancing. In Gaza there is joyous shooting in the air. But for us, for Jews all over the world, and in the hearts of good men and women of all peoples, there is profound sadness--an אבדל קבד מאוד, for we have lost the general who fought for Jerusalem in the War of Independence, who as ~~Commander-in-Chief~~ of the armed forces of Israel in 1967 liberated Jerusalem, who served his country gallantly as Minister of *Leader and of* Defense and as Prime Minister twice and who, above all, was a man of great נפש, of a courage that will inspire generations to come of our people.

תהא נפשו ונשמתו צרורה בצרור החיים.