

Seeking Shalom Bayit (Peace in the House)

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For me, November 4th will always be a date that commemorates a horrible blow to a democracy. No, not November 4th, 2020, November 4th, 1995, because it was on that date that Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin was assassinated in cold blood by an insane ideological fanatic who felt justified to murder his Prime Minister, because he was opposed to the peace process that Rabin had been duly elected to pursue. On that dark day, Jews around the world were stunned to discover the depth of the divide that lay between us.

I had lived in Israel the year prior to Rabin's assassination. And almost everyday I walked past his home on my way to school. The large protests consisting primarily of West Bank Settlers outside his house were alarming, and the signs that they posted in the neighborhood were unnerving to me.

The sign that haunts me still was the one that said:

“ קול דמי אחיך צעקים אלי - The blood of your brother cries out to me (Gen. 4:10)!”

They were accusing Rabin of being a murderer for pursuing a peace agreement that was based on trading land for peace. For the protestors, this was beyond the pale, unacceptable, and tantamount to murdering the State of Israel itself. It laid a shocking theological foundation that justified Rabin's murderers action.

While Jews around the world were shocked by Rabin's assassination, we shouldn't have been. In the months and years prior to his murder, civil discourse had been eroding and devolving into members of the Keneset calling each other Nazis. There had begun a dehumanization of the other that led the radicals on the extreme right to feel that they were the true keepers of the Jewish flame, and that those who went against them, were also going against God's will. I was shaken as one of our professors spoke of the possibility of there being a civil war, and

upset at the deafening silence of elected officials on the right who failed to condemn the dangerous rhetoric.

And Rabin himself was naïve to the danger he was facing. While warned by the Israeli Secret Service, he refused to believe that he could be murdered by a fellow Jew.

Memories of this dark time have come back to me this week, which is not only the 25th anniversary of Rabin's murder, but also the week of the most contentious American election in my lifetime.

While Israel is my homeland, America is my home. A home that we have come to see is deeply divided against itself. And as President Lincoln famously said two years before the American Civil War "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

It breaks my heart to realize that the one painfully clear result from this week's election is not who won, but who has lost. Regardless of who sits in the White House come January, it will be hard to call ourselves the "United" States of America. This election has shown us to be a house divided, fractured down the middle, with little interest coming from either side to come together to heal what has been broken.

This election has painted a stark picture that illustrates that what we have in our country are two fundamentally different ways of understanding what it means to be an American, both in terms of our values and our behavior.

Sadly, what is being played out on our screens and around our dinner tables, is not a new problem. From our very inception we have struggled to understand what it means to be the "United" States of America, a union of vastly different regions, a loosely bound coalition of cultures, ethnicities and disparate identities.

Right now, our country is horrifyingly reminiscent of where Israel was 25 years ago, just prior to Rabin's assassination. The demonization of those who disagree with us. The waving of weapons and the threat of violence at protests, and law enforcement failing to arrest those who

flaunt the law, regardless of their political affiliation. The painful silence of the nation's leaders, refusing to come together to loudly condemn the paranoid and delusional accusations and dangerous threats made towards our elected officials.

Our democracy is at a precipice, it is our last chance to turn back without risking falling over the edge.

This afternoon, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the head of the Reform Movement in North America wrote: "American democracy is not perfect. Since the nation's founding, it has diminished and even excluded the voices of women and of people of Color, in law and in practice. Despite these historic and ongoing flaws, our democracy is sound. ... The Talmud teaches that a ruler is not to be appointed until the community is consulted. The community has been consulted. Now it's time to wait patiently to hear what every voice and every vote has said. We call on the President to affirm the strength of our democracy and electoral system. And we call on leaders at the local, state, and national levels to do the same."

So what do we do when all all that is left to do is wait? We pray. So I will conclude with a prayer by Rabbi Karyn Kedar, a prayer for national healing.

Grace in the Wilderness

God, creator of light and goodness,
may we find grace in the wilderness. (Based on Jeremiah 31:2)

Help this great nation emerge from chaos and fear to
healing and tranquility.

We ask our leaders to act with insight and honor,
to carry authority with humility and compassion.

Righteousness exalts a nation. (Proverbs 14:34)

And as for me, Holy One of Blessing,
may this be my prayer:

Still my troubled being,
for I yearn to emerge from darkness and confusion.

Lift me, carry me, set me upon a rock
that I may feel safe within the storm.

I have sat in the valley of tears long enough. (Based on L'chah Dodi)
Strengthen my resolve that I may be a force for good,
a light when there is darkness.
Help me be guided by acts of love and kindness,
compassion and understanding.
May I find the way to transcend my inclination for strife
and be a bearer of hope and righteousness.
Though I have fallen, I rise again;
though I sit in darkness, God is my light. (Micah 7:8)
Guide me, comfort me, grant me strength.
May this be my prayer.
Amen.