

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

I'm not ashamed to say that it was my first Rabin Memorial ceremony. I had always avoided the official ceremony marking Rabin's assassination. I was as horrified as anyone at his murder, and I mourn his passing, but they were never going to get me to mourn the end of the Oslo Peace Accords.

For religious settlers like me, the idea of Oslo was suicidal. Quite apart from the fact that the Accords would throw us out of our homes in Judea and Samaria, we also knew they would never bring peace with the Palestinians. But Prime Minister Rabin wouldn't listen. According to him, we were still the "cancer of society" -- an old remark that he'd made about settlers and had never rowed back. And, so, we fought like crazy against Rabin the politician. I was and am a proud religious Israeli, and I had hated what Rabin was doing to our country. But I never in a million years hoped he'd be shot. "Thou shalt not murder" is above all else.

So, I'm glad that his assassin Yigal Amir sits in prison, and the fact that Amir wears a kippa is irrelevant at best and a blasphemous distortion at worst. But suddenly the day after the murder everyone was looking at me like I had loaded the gun. Anyone looking even vaguely religious who visited Tel Aviv was automatically treated like an evil accomplice to murder. Many of my friends stopped taking meetings in Tel Aviv for fear of being spat at, or cursed for the murder of "their" Rabin.

And, so, I had stayed away from the Memorial ceremonies. There was no place for me there. It was never about mourning or paying tribute to the man. It was all about condemning "those evil settlers" who had destroyed the "peace process." As if the Oslo Accords had brought anything but misery to Jews and Arabs. It felt like they were making up for the lack of peace with Arabs by waging war with us, their Jewish brothers and sisters. They chose to demonize hundreds of thousands of good Jews while embracing white doves of peace.

This time it was different. Some twenty years after the assassination there I was. At Kings of Israel Square, that they now call Rabin Square. Standing together with my fellow Israelis of all stripes, marking the disgraceful assassination of our Prime Minister and finally acknowledging that we are One People. This year the organizers of the ceremony had decided to leave the politicians at home, leave the hatred behind, and instead invite us all to mark the end of the abyss that the Rabin's assassination had riven in Israeli society. No matter our differences, we are one. Which is why I was there. To hear and support our Sara.

Sara is one of the founders of our settlement in the heart of Samaria. Her son had just been killed a few months ago in a murderous terrorist attack. But this great woman chose to accept an invitation to speak at the Rabin Memorial. To talk of peace and unity.

She began without a waver in her voice: "I am a Jewish woman, a resident of the State of Israel. I am a wife. I am a mother, but the label I carry that brings me here this evening is the most painful of all..."

But before I could listen to the rest of her speech, a man screamed out: "No, you're not! You're not! You're not a resident of the State of Israel! That's the whole point!"

Someone shouted at him to be quiet, but he kept shouting:

"She's a settler! She lives over the Green Line. In the Occupied Territories. How can she say she's a resident of the State of Israel? That's not Israel!"

"She can say what she wants. It's a free country," someone called out.

The man was close to tears: "But she's speaking from the podium of the Rabin Memorial. She's pretending there's no difference between the West Bank and the State of Israel. Over Rabin's dead body, no less. Don't you see? This blurring of borders – this! – this is what Rabin was trying to end! He wanted Israel on this side of the Green Line, and Palestine on the other side of the Green Line. Two States for two Peoples. Don't you see? He was murdered for trying to clarify once and for all that settlers are living on the land of the Palestinians, outside of the State of Israel. That's what he was killed for, that's why we're all here tonight. To remember the Green Line. To remember the two-state solution. And now we're honoring this woman for making Rabin's sacrifice meaningless."

"Be quiet!" shouted someone else. "The media is dying to report that we're against the religious. They're dying to label the murder as something only the left care about. We have to show a united front. How else are we going to get people to care about our democracy?"

Another called out, "I think it's wonderful that there are religious people here, right-wingers and left-wingers. Rabin was the Prime Minister of us all, not just of the Left. Tonight is about coming together."

I dared to speak up. "Don't you care about making peace?" I said, surprised by the emotion in my voice. All eyes turned to me, dressed, as I was, in similar traditional fashion to Sara on the stage. "Rabin's murder was a horrific symptom of our civil war that continues to this day. Jew must stop hating Jew. Jew must never kill Jew again. We must stop fighting each other."

The man looked at me, eyes glistening. "But you are not my enemy. So long as you're not shooting me it's okay if we fight. We don't have to agree about everything. But Rabin wanted to make peace with the Palestinians. He wanted to make peace with our enemy. He wanted a two-state solution, which meant giving up your precious Judea and Samaria. And

the man who murdered him knew this and shot him to stop him. Now your friend is up there, rubbing our noses in the settlers' victory and Rabin's greatest failure."

He raised his hands as if in surrender, or despair, or both. He walked away, leaving the square and the ceremony altogether. I thought about calling him back. I thought about leaving myself. But I stayed, and turned back to listen to my brave friend, speaking of the son she had lost in this terrible war.

LEADING QUESTIONS FOR ARGUMENT:

- *With which of the characters, if any, do you agree?*
- *What would you say is the purpose of Yom Rabin?*
- *Should Yom Rabin strive to include all kinds of people, or are there people it should exclude?*

WORKING WITH THE STORY:

When assessing how you might work with this story in your educational context, consider answering three questions about your learners:

- 1) What don't they know?
- 2) What do they need to know?
- 3) When do they need to know it?

When addressing the meaning of Yom Rabin, what information are your learners lacking? Are they aware of what and where the Green Line is, for example? Do they know who Rabin was and what he was most known for? Do they know when Rabin was assassinated? Do they know that the nature of Yom Rabin throughout Israel, in schools and municipalities, is still controversial?

WHAT DO THEY NEED TO KNOW?

In order to connect with the story, and in order to engage in a conversation about it, what pieces of information do they need, and what can they do without? For example, while it is good to know when the assassination took place, it is not relevant to the values clash at the heart of the story. On the other hand, a great deal of the meaning of the story is bound up in the nature of the Green Line: Too much would be missed if the learner did not know about it.

WHEN DO THEY NEED TO KNOW IT?

As we've already established, the participants will need to know about or be taught about the basics of the Green Line and the Oslo Accords, in order to grasp the basic storyline. Thus, this information must come before engaging with the story. However, such information as the date of the assassination, and the place of Yom Rabin in Israeli culture, could come after having discussed the story. Indeed, it may be that the story, and its ensuing argument, will open up a further curiosity to learn more later.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE THEY KNOW...

...TO ENABLE THEM TO ARGUE OVER THIS STORY

- In 1994 Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords with the Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat. In these accords Israel would gradually hand over control of the West Bank/Judea and Samaria to the newly-created Palestinian Authority, and (probably) disband Jewish settlements there.
- Yigal Amir, a religious Jewish Israeli, assassinated Prime Minister Rabin on November 6th, 1995, in protest of the Oslo Accords
- The Oslo Accords were vehemently resisted by at least half of Jewish Israel, led by settlers and their (mostly Orthodox religious) supporters.
- Ever since 1967 Israel has been in control of the land between the ceasefire line of 1949 (the Green Line) and the Jordan River.
- Many Israeli Jews call this area Judea and Samaria, according to its biblical name, while Palestinians and others call the area the West Bank (of the Jordan River) or Occupied Palestine.
- Some 2 million Palestinians live there, and in the past 50 years some half million Jewish Israelis have made their home there, too. These latter are often known as settlers.
- Israel's military is in control of this area. Jews living there are citizens of Israel, and may vote in Israel's elections, while the Palestinians living there are not citizens of Israel and may not vote. They are officially served by the Palestinian authority, for which there has been no election for over a decade and has limited powers.
- The Oslo Accords did not bring about a gradual growing peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and many have died on both sides since. Some say this is because the architect and leader of this process, Prime Minister Rabin, was not alive to shepherd it forward. Others say the Oslo Accords themselves were misguided in the first place.
- The way in which Israel marks Rabin's assassination continues to be a source of contention.