

The year was 1994. I was a fairly new rabbi, having been ordained in 1992. History was going to be made in 1994, and the world would be able to watch it happen. On the White House lawn, Yitzchak Rabin, עליו השלום (May peace be upon him), and Yassar Arafat, ימח שמו מתחת השמים (May his name be erased from under the heavens), were going to sign the Oslo Accords. At long last, Israel would be recognized as by the PLO, and peace would soon follow. I knew that would entail giving some of the Land of Israel to the Palestinians, but I believed in the words of Israeli broadcaster and international lecturer Freda Keet, who said we give up some of our land with breaking hearts so that the bloodshed will stop and so Israel can go about her business of living and contributing to the world and stop spending so much time and money, and losing so many lives, because of the Palestinians.

It would be a painful price to pay, but one we would pay for the peace for which we had waited so long. I was younger

then; I was, perhaps, more naive, and I was certainly more optimistic about the nascent peace process than I am now. But my fantasy of peace received a telling blow only moments after I thought that the first step toward peace had been taken.

A television station in Fort Myers called me and asked me to come to their studio and watch the signing on television with a Palestinian. They would take some film of us watching the signing, and then interview us. I immediately agreed.

I watched the signing of the Oslo Accords. I watched as Prime Minister Rabin was forced to do something he did not want to do: shake the hand of Arafat. But President Clinton very much wanted a handshake, and Arafat was so eager for the photo op that he almost pulled Rabin's arm out of the socket from grabbing his so hard. Years later, I wrote an article for the newspaper on Oslo and

referred to the “infamous handshake on the White House lawn.” I got a call from the editor of the paper saying that she was changing the word infamous to famous because I obviously did not realize that infamous carried negative connotations. I thanked her for her diligence, explained that my use of the word infamous was done with full awareness of the meaning of the word, and told her to print it as written.

When the ceremony in Washington was over, I was interviewed. I talked about perspective, saying that getting the other side to acknowledge Israel’s right to exist was only a small step toward eventual peace, but certainly there would be no peace without recognition. The PLO had promised to change its charter to eliminate the call for the destruction of the “Zionist entity.” My remarks reflected some caution, but great optimism.

That optimism was short lived. The Palestinian who had watched ceremony with me was interviewed next. His words were that of a revisionist historian, although I suspect that many historical revisionist know full well what they are doing. This man had been brought up to believe in lies. He talked about how the Palestinians had, time after time, “extended the hand of peace to the Zionists,” only to be slapped in the face every time. I was stunned. I asked him if he knew that immediately after the Six Day War, Israel had offered to withdraw from all captured land in return for peace treaties, and that the Arab leadership met in Khartoum and responded with the infamous (there’s that word again, and again, I mean it) “Three No’s:” No peace treaties, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations. This is indisputable historical fact. The Palestinian told me I had it backwards. It had been Israel that refused to make peace. I had been told Zionist lies. It was clear to me that he really did believe what he said.

My friends, sixteen years have passed. There is still no peace. I think nothing short of a revolution in the Arab world will be necessary before there can be peace. There may be a great many peace loving Palestinians that would live happily next to a Jewish state. Those Palestinians are irrelevant in that they are powerless. Unless and until they take power, there will be no peace. The current Palestinian leadership does not want it any more than Arafat did—remember when Ehud Barak offered him everything he wanted and he still said no?

Next Thursday night, there will be a special event commemorating the yahrtzeit of Yitzhak Rabin. I will be one of three rabbis sharing reflections that night. There will also be reflections by some Israelis, including our community *shaliach*, Guy Shahaar. I am especially eager to hear Guy's words, because he was a little boy at the time of Rabin's murder, but his life was shaped by that tragic event, just as mine was shaped by the assassination of

President Kennedy when I was five years old. It promises to be a powerfully moving and education evening, and I hope that you will all be able to attend. It begins at 7:00 at the JCC. Flyers are available in the lobby.

My friends, President Kennedy was killed with two speeches in his pocket that were to be delivered later that day. Prime Minister Rabin was killed with a song sheet in his pocket. It was discovered after the murder, drenched in his blood. It was the lyrics to a song that Rabin had joined in singing at the rally that immediately preceded his murder. It is called שיר לשלום, *Shir LaShalom*, A Song for Peace. It is with the translation of that song that I conclude my talk tonight:

Let the sun rise
light up the morning
The purest of prayers
will not bring us back

He whose candle was snuffed out
and was buried in the dust
bitter crying won't wake him up
and won't bring him back

Nobody will bring us back
from a dead and darkened pit here,
neither the victory cheer
nor songs of praise will help
So just sing a song for peace
don't whisper a prayer
Just sing a song for peace
in a loud shout

Allow the sun to penetrate
through the flowers
don't look back
let go of those departed

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!