

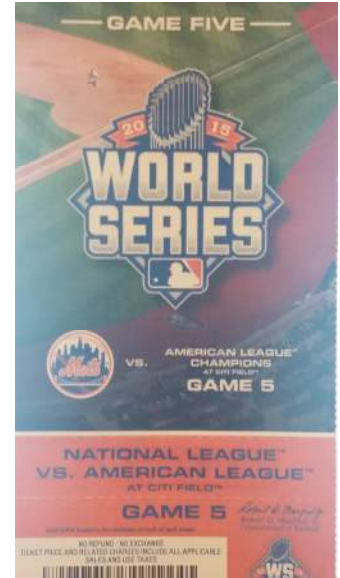
Baseball, Lakin, Rabin, and Peace

A week ago, my family and I were pulling up to the home where we would spend Shabbat in Toms River, NJ, so we could attend a *Bat Mitzvah*, when I received a text message from a friend: “Looks like I have an extra ticket for game 5.”

Wow!

We were already in the New York area and being a fairly serious Mets fan, I was being offered an opportunity to see my team in the World Series. This was not a decision I had to agonize over.

I did need them to win a game so there would be a fifth game (they obliged and won big that night) and a way to get home (I rented a car one-way). I met two of my close friends from rabbinical school, who are also huge Mets fans; they flew up from Atlanta for the game on Sunday night!



Rabbi Joshua Heller, Rabbi David Lerner, and Rabbi Michael Bernstein (left to right)

We met before the game; it took us back to the 90s when we cut out of rabbinical school to attend Opening Day.

We had an amazing time – we enjoyed the *kosher* food at Citifield for dinner and picked up some souvenirs. It felt a little like a *yontif* or the high holy days of baseball, as it were. The stadium was all dressed up in red, white, and blue banners and everyone was in a giddy mood. The game itself was great for...eight innings, as the Mets were winning 2-0.

At the end of the eighth, since the Mets bullpen had faltered in two previous games, the entire stadium chanted, “We want Harvey!” urging the manager to let his starting pitcher close out the game. He came out, walked the first batter he faced and gave up a double to the second. The Mets closer came in, but it was too late.

Even though the Mets got two ground balls, the Royals scored the tying run with some aggressive base running. The entire stadium, 50,000 people, stood in shocked silence. It was like watching a car accident in slow motion. All the dreams of a win were dashed.

The game continued until the twelfth inning when the inevitable occurred; the Mets surrendered a number of runs and lost. The Royals won the World Series and I was there to see it. For a life-long Mets fan, it was humbling.

Many before me have commented that baseball is like life. It has ups and downs; it is a difficult, at times unforgiving, game. It can provide unexpected elation and devastating defeat. And as Red Sox fans knew for 86 years and as Cubs fans *still* know (107 years and counting! My heart goes out to all Cubs fans...), sometimes you have to cope with losing. And sure enough, I needed to let go, coping with my sadness and disappointment.

But baseball is just a game...mostly....

It is not life.

The past few weeks have provided us with far more serious situations with which we could be extremely disappointed and dismayed.

In particular, I am thinking of the situation in Israel. The terrorist attacks on Jews involving stabbings and car ramming attacks have taken the lives of a number of Israeli Jews and wounded many.

One of those murders was particularly striking.

As Jodi Rudoren (incidentally, a former USYer from the Boston area) wrote in the *New York Times*: "Mr. Lakin, 76, was shot in the head and stabbed in the face and chest by Palestinian assailants on a public bus in Jerusalem at the height of this month's violent uprising. An American who moved to Israel three decades ago



(he sent his children to Camp Ramah in New England), he died after two weeks in the hospital,

where he had many surgeries and a parade of visitors, including Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon of the United Nations, and students from Hand in Hand, Jerusalem's joint Arab-Jewish school.

Hand In Hand

Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel
יד ביד: המרכז לחינוך יהודי ערבי בישראל (ע"ר)
يدأ بيد: مركز التربية العربي اليهودي في اسرائيل



Mr. Lakin's story is one of a teacher, a man who stood up for coexistence, being felled by its failure.

“He was just a deeply optimistic and hopeful person, and refused to be deterred by the grim political reality here,” said Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman of *Kol Haneshama*, the Jerusalem synagogue where Mr. Lakin was a longtime member. “He wasn’t oblivious to the reality, but it didn’t affect his basic existential nature. He could not imagine a solution wasn’t possible and that people couldn’t learn to live together.”

“A civil rights activist and Connecticut elementary school principal, Mr. Lakin moved to Jerusalem with his family in 1984. He taught English to Israeli and Palestinian children, performed in musicals and, according to Rabbi Weiman-Kelman, never missed a peace rally.

“After a routine doctor’s appointment on Oct. 13, Mr. Lakin called his ex-wife (and still best friend), Karen, to say he was taking the No. 78 bus rather than walking home because he thought it would be safer amid the spate of stabbings on Jerusalem streets.

“Hadassah and Jerusalem’s other hospitals are rare oases of the Arab-Jewish coexistence Mr. Lakin promoted. A Palestinian nurse in the emergency room recognized him as he was wheeled in: Her two sons had taken his classes. The surgical team that struggled to stitch together his injured organs included Dr. Abed Khalaileh, an Arab from East Jerusalem, like the attackers on the bus.

“When I talked to the family, I had tears in my eyes — this is a man and he didn’t do anything. What did he do to deserve such a punishment?” Dr. Khalaileh said later. “I am not political here, my goal is not to judge, and I try and disconnect. But still, you live with a sensation that isn’t good, that after all, the person who carried out this attack is from your people.”

“One of the attackers, Bilal Abu Ghanem, had surgery in the same hospital, at the same time.

“[Mr. Lakin’s son,] Mr. Avni, who Hebraicized his last name, said he soon learned that the slain attacker, Bahas Alian, had announced his plans on Facebook. While sitting vigil in the hospital, the family was incensed to find on social networks a re-enactment of the bus attack “to encourage others to take the same action,” Mr. Avni said, and “specific instructions on how to slice someone’s chest open and cut their intestines like what was done to my father.”

“Mr. Lakin’s own Facebook page had as its cover a photo of a boy in a Jewish skullcap and one in a Palestinian *kaffiyeh* under a “Coexist” logo made from religious symbols.

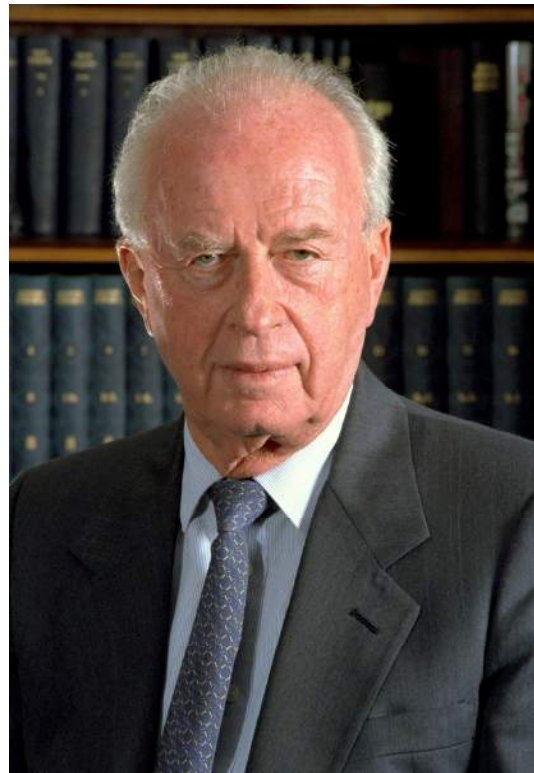


“Shachar Boteach, at 16 the oldest of Mr. Lakin’s eight grandchildren, told the crowd it felt “like the air has been taken out of my lungs.”

“I know you would want me to always try to be a better person and do the right thing. You would want me to spread love and happiness everywhere I go,” she said, speaking directly to his body wrapped in a

Jewish prayer shawl. “I think you wouldn’t want me to have not even one ounce of hate in my body, even though what has been done to you.”

But that is not the only terrible event or disappointment of recent times. This week we remembered the 20th anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, z”l, the Prime Minister of Israel who was shot to death on a Saturday night after a peace rally in Tel Aviv. I was living in Israel that year and spent the Saturday night of his murder with friends (including the same ones who joined me for the Mets game) studying the *midrash* about why Cain may have killed Abel – the first murder in human history.



As we walked home, we saw people screaming and crying in the streets and learned that Rabin had been shot by a right-wing Jewish assassin. Tragically, he died and the country, the Jewish people, and many others throughout the world went into mourning.

Perhaps even more tragically, his murder was successful not only in killing Rabin, but also in derailing the peace process, thus achieving his murderer’s ultimate goal. As opposed to assassinations in the U.S., where often people have rallied around the values of the person who was killed – see how the country supported Lyndon Johnson after JFK’s assassination to pass civil rights and voting rights legislation – in Israel, the supporters of peace have failed.

That is not to say that there is no blame on the Palestinian side – there is, including the Palestinian’s rejection of Israel’s peace offers in 2000 and 2008; however, on the Israeli side, the supporters of peace did not persuade enough Israelis to rally behind the vision of their murdered leader.

Sometimes, the death of a charismatic leader is devastating. A new book, *Killing A King: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Remaking of Israel*, by Dan Efron makes such an argument. As the *New York Times* review stated, “Unlike so many other homicidal villains in history who galvanized the very movements they wished to stop, Mr. Amir [the murderer] got exactly what he wanted.”



THE ASSASSINATION OF YITZHAK RABIN
AND THE REMAKING OF ISRAEL



This morning, we read the third of the trilogy of Torah portions about Abraham’s life. As Alan said earlier, it contains Sarah’s death, the story of how a wife was found for Isaac, and the narrative of Abraham’s death.

The Torah tells us that Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father in the Cave of *Makhpelah*. Our earliest spiritual ancestor is laid to rest by his two sons in what becomes a family tomb.

What do we know about these two sons?



Cave of the Patriarchs (exterior), Israel (photo by Yair Aronshtam)

Well, we know that Sarah sent away Ishmael and his mother Hagar. It would seem likely that these two sons would be estranged.

According to the rabbinic tradition, Ishmael becomes an ancestor of Mohammed, who founds Islam. Isaac becomes an ancestor of the Jewish people.

And so, we are reminded that we are supposed to work together with our brothers, as we share the same father, Avraham.

A couple of weeks ago, Israel's President, Reuven Rivlin, said that Ishmael and Isaac, the children of Hagar and the children of Sarah have a long history together. Listen to his message: "Specifically during these tense days, we must remember that building trust between Jews and Arabs within Israel and outside, is not just an option – it is a necessity. Even if you shutter the window, the other side will not disappear. Even if you burn the bridge today, you will have to build it again tomorrow. The road is long and difficult, and in this mission there are no shortcuts. But make no mistake – this task is the task which lies before this generation, its leaders, and before future generations."



In the spirit of Mr. Lakin, z”l, Rabbi Fel and I had an opportunity to build a bridge – to support our Muslim neighbors. The Islamic Center of Burlington, a local mosque, was vandalized for the fourth time in the last five years earlier in the week. Two 18-year-olds spray-painted the building with the letters: “USA, USA,” perhaps implying that the worshippers there are not real Americans.

The Mosque in Burlington left the vandalism on the walls for all to see and invited the community on Wednesday to “retag” the building with words of support. It was incredibly



LICA members: Rabbi Michael Fel, Narain Bhatia, Rabbi David Lerner, and Pastor Brent Maracle (left to right)

powerful to hear various faith leaders and political leaders all come together with words of unity, words of healing, words of

peace.

I wrote the word “Shalom” in Hebrew letters with the message: “peace unto you.”

Oseh Shalom

Bimromav – may the One

who makes peace in the heavens, helps us make peace on earth and let us all say: Amen.

