Lesson 64 B

A Soldier for Peace
Jonathan: Shalom uvruchim haba-im leshiur 64-B. In this lesson we will be reading Yitzhak Rabin’s biography, abridged from the website of The Yitzhak Rabin Center, www.rabincenter.org.il, used with their kind permission.

Yitzhak Rabin was born in Jerusalem on March 1, 1922. In his parents’ home he absorbed the Zionist movement values that guided him throughout his life. In 1928 Rabin enrolled at the Educational Center for Workers’ Children in Tel Aviv, an institution that was to become his second home. He went on to study Agriculture at the Kadouri Agricultural School in Kfar Tabor, and there he met and developed a close friendship with Yigal Allon who would later enlist him into the Haganah (the Jewish underground defense organization that existed prior to the founding of the State of Israel).

In May 1941, during World War II, Rabin was called upon to take part in a military operation in Lebanon aimed at helping the British army. It was his baptism of fire.

The Palmach, the Haganah’s elite strike force, was set up in 1941 and Yitzhak Rabin
was one of the first to join its ranks. He saw the founding of an independent Jewish force in Palestine as the most important mission of his generation. When the Palmach expanded, and its companies organized into battalions, Rabin was appointed as deputy commander of the First Battalion.

The British had begun to severely restrict Jewish Aliyah (immigration) to Palestine, and the Palmach participated in the struggle to allow such immigration, especially among Holocaust survivors. Rabin was appointed commander of the Palmach’s Second Battalion, and in October, 1947 he became the Palmach’s Chief Operations Officer.

During Israel’s War of Independence, Rabin’s primary concern was beefing up the Palmach force with munitions and men, and keeping open the way to Jerusalem, which was under constant attack from Arab villages along the route. In April 1948, Rabin, at the age of 24, was appointed the commander of the Harel Brigade, which was part of the operation to take over Jerusalem as the British withdrew.

במהלך מלחמת העצמאות עשה רבין בסיור תחבור בحمام של הפלמ”ח בנסוך יבנה, أيام 1941 יישן רבין היה ראשוני

הבריטים החלו להגבילに入る חמור בביצועה אמרות את העלייה היהודית לארץ ישראל, הפליים" they had begun to severely restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine, and the Palmach participated in the struggle to allow such immigration, especially among Holocaust survivors. Rabin was appointed commander of the Palmach’s Second Battalion, and in October, 1947 he became the Palmach’s Chief Operations Officer.

haBritim hechelu lehagbil bezzura chamura et ha-aliya haYehudit leErezz Israel, vehaPalma”ch hishtatfed bama-avak kedey le-afsher et ha-aliya, beikar avur nizzoley hasho-a. Rabin muna limfaked hagdud hasheni shel haPalma”ch, uvOktober 1947, likzzin hamivzza-im shel haPalma”ch.

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During the second cease-fire of the war, the Palmach was disassembled and its battalions assimilated into the Israel Defense Forces (or “IDF”). Rabin took advantage of the cease-fire to marry his girlfriend Leah Schlossberg.

In July 1949, when the War of Independence came to an end, Rabin decided to continue his military service. In November 1949, Yitzhak Rabin was appointed commander of the Battalion Commanders School. Rabin's success in this role paved the way for his climb up the IDF ranks.

In April 1959, Rabin was appointed the head of the Operations Branch, where he worked on formulating an overall IDF defense doctrine adapted to developments in
the Middle East arena. In January 1961, Rabin was named Deputy Chief of Staff in parallel to his position as head of Operations Branch. The appointment reflected his senior standing in the defense establishment and marked him as a candidate for the next Chief of Staff. In June 1963, Levi Eshkol was elected Prime Minister and in December of that year the cabinet approved Rabin’s appointment as Chief of Staff.

In 1967, during Rabin’s fourth year as Chief of Staff, the Six Day War broke out. Rabin had an unshakable belief in the IDF’s ability to win the war, and the army under his command was ready and waiting for battle. On June 4, the government decided to go to war and on June 5, in an operation involving almost all its planes, the Air Force attacked the airbases and air forces of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Jordan, dealing them a mortal blow.

BeApril 1959, Rabin muna lefatkid Rosh Agaf HaMivzza-im, shem asak begibush torat lechima Zzaha"lit kolelet, hamut-emet lahitpatchuyot bazirz haMizrach Tichonit. beYanuar 1961, muna Rabin, benosaf letafkaido krosh Aga"m, liSgan HaRamatka"l. minuyo bite befumbi et ma-amado habachir bema-arechet habitachon vesimen oto kemu-amad letafkaid haRamatka"l haba. beYuni 1963, nivchar Levi Eshkol lerashut hamemshala, uvDezzember ota shan ishra hamemshala et minuyo shel Rabin leRamatka"l.

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Be 1967, bashana harevi-it lichunato shel Rabin keRamatka"l, parzza milchemet Sheshet HaYamim. Rabin haya chadur emuna bilti me-ur-eret bicholto shel Zzaha"l lenazzeach bama-aracha, vehazzava tachat pikudo haya daruch umuchan lakrav. ba-4 beYuni hechlita hamemshala liftoach bemitkafa uva-5 beYuni, bif-ula sheba hishtatfu kim-at kol metosey hakrav shel Zzaha"l, takaf cheyl ha-avir halsraeli et
sdot hate-ufa ve-et cheylot ha-avir shel Mizzra-im, Surya, Irak veYarden, ufaga bahem pgi-a anusha.

For his part in the victory, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem decided to bestow upon Major General Yitzhak Rabin an honorary doctorate as an expression of the gratitude the Israeli public felt toward the architect of victory. In a speech summing up the campaign, Rabin, without arrogance or glee in the victory, stressed the heavy cost of the war to both the victors and the defeated nations.

At the beginning of 1968, after 27 years of military service, Yitzhak Rabin hung up his uniform and was appointed to his first civil post: Israel's ambassador to the United States. His first year in the post was a presidential election year in the United States, and Rabin used that time to study the apparatus of American government, to get to know the prominent figures in the American media and to develop relations with the Jewish community and with the heads of important Jewish organizations.
Despite the then existing tensions between Israel and the United States over the administration's plans for a Middle East settlement, and Israel's objections to those plans, Rabin managed to foster special relations between the two nations.

On March 1973, after serving five years as ambassador, Yitzhak Rabin returned to Israel and joined the Labor Party. Elections were slated for December of that year, but on October 6, 1973, the Yom Kippur War broke out unexpectedly. At the end of the war, many doubts were raised about the intelligence failures which led to the initial success of the enemy's surprise attack on Israel and the resulting heavy casualties.

On April 11, 1974, under public pressure, Prime Minister Golda Meir resigned and the Labor Party set out to appoint a replacement. Rabin was a surprise candidate for the senior post, but the fact that he was blameless for the failures of the war was a factor in the party's choosing him to take the place of Golda Meir as Prime Minister.
Rabin took office on June 3, 1974. During his three years as Prime Minister he guided a policy that reflected the Labor Party's continuity of power, but also a changing of the guard within the party and its willingness for change.


Rabin saw resumption of the peace initiative and progress towards peace as a critical mission. After negotiations mediated by the American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, Israel signed an interim accord with Egypt on September 1, 1975. This was one of Rabin’s major achievements as Prime Minister.

bechidush hayozma hamedinit uvahtarikdmut leshalom ra-a Rabin mesima hechrechit. leachar masa umatan betivucho shel makzik hamedina haAmerikani, Henri Kisinjer, chatma Israel al heskem beyna-im im Mizzra-im be-1 beSeptember, 1975. haya ze echad mehesegav hamishmauti-im shel Rabin keRosh Memshala.
Despite the many successes during Rabin’s first term as Prime Minister, corruption scandals in the higher echelons of the Labor Party and the residues of the Yom Kippur War, overshadowed the achievements of his government and aroused many against it.

למרות ההצלחות הרבות בתפקידו כחבר הכנסת מחוז חיפה, ושערוריית שחיתות בדרגות הבכירים של מפלגת העבודה והמשקעים של מלחמת יום כיפור, האפלים על ההישגים של הממשלה ויוצרו לה מתנגדים רבים.

Elections held in May 1977 saw the Labor Party lose power. For the first time, the Likud under Menahem Begin headed a coalition government. Labor went into the opposition. As an MK (Member of Knesset—the Israeli parliament), Rabin watched the visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Israel with excitement. Despite his reservations regarding clauses concerning the disbanding of settlements in the Sinai, Rabin voted in favor of the peace agreement with Egypt.

After elections in July 1984, neither of the big parties had enough seats to form a government, and a National Unity Government was formed. Rabin was appointed as Defense Minister and he served in that post until 1990.
After the Intifada broke out, Rabin recognized that the uprising reflected authentic Palestinian national aspirations that Israel could no longer ignore. In 1989 Rabin formulated a two-stage peace agreement that proposed an eventual permanent status agreement with the Palestinians. Under American pressure, the plan received the support of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. But in 1990, the National Unity Government collapsed and the Labor Party returned to the opposition.

During the Gulf War, the response of the Israeli home front sharpened Rabin’s feeling that the Israeli public had tired of war and was willing to pay the price of peace. He knew that for this purpose, brave leadership was required, and he believed in his ability to fulfill the task. In the next elections, Rabin was re-elected as Prime Minister and Labor returned to power. Rabin declared his willingness to make territorial compromises and immediately renewed peace talks with the Palestinians and Syria.
On September 13, 1993, in a festive ceremony on the lawns of the White House, with the participation of the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, the Oslo Accords were signed. The Accords laid the foundation for a permanent status agreement that was to include the foundation of a Palestinian entity alongside Israel.

On October 26, 1994, the Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace was signed, and the final borders between the two countries were set. The treaty was an important milestone in the development of relations with Arab and other Muslim countries. However, a string of suicide bombings by opponents of the peace process hit civilians in Israel’s urban centers and dealt a blow to hopes that the region had embarked on an era of prosperity and growth.
The award of the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1994 symbolized the world’s honor and esteem for the peace makers and was an expression of encouragement and hope that they would continue their efforts and bring the difficult process to fruition. Despite the fact that the Israeli public was divided in its opinions, Rabin was determined to press ahead with the peace process.

In September 1995, an agreement was reached on a timetable for execution of the Oslo Accords and on ways to implement the Accords. Opponents of the agreement prepared to block its execution. They arranged demonstrations and protests against its instigator, Yitzhak Rabin. The incitement the protesters fermented was taken by extremists as a license to kill.
The peace camp, which had looked on in hope at the progress of the talks, was shocked by the ferocity of the opposition to the agreements and decided to give a public show of support for the government's moves.

On Saturday evening, November 4, 1995 - the 12th of Heshvan, 5756 - Yitzhak Rabin came to the Kings of Israel Square to participate in a rally under the slogan "Yes to Peace - No to Violence".

After a warm and supportive rally, at which the crowd expressed its faith in him and its love for him, as he headed for his car, Yitzhak Rabin was shot and mortally wounded by a Jewish assassin.
The Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, had been assassinated.

רַחֲשׁ מְמַשֵּׁלָת יִשְׂרָאֵל, יִצְחָק רַבִּין, נירָזָח.

Rosh Memshelet Israel, Izzchak Rabin, nirzzach.

Jonathan: Thank you being with us for the B part of Lesson 64. The C Lesson will include eulogies that were read at Yitzhak Rabin’s grave by family members, friends, and politicians, as well as the text of two speeches made by Rabin himself: one upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize; and the other, his last speech, from the peace rally at the Kings of Israel Square in Tel Aviv, about an hour before being assassinated.