

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

Rabin Annual Lecture:  
"Building a Secure Peace,"

Tel Aviv, Israel

11/11/99

**Rabin Annual Lecture: "Building A Secure Peace"**  
**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**Tel Aviv Performing Arts Center**  
**Tel Aviv, Israel**  
**November 11, 1999**

Thank you so much, Leah. I am deeply honored to be here for this occasion and to have been asked to deliver the annual Rabin lecture. I do this with full awareness that nothing I could say today could ever come close to the eloquence that we just heard in brief excerpts in the video about Yitzhak Rabin.

I am delighted to be here with the Rabin family, including Rachel, Dalia, Noah, Jonathan, and Avi. I am delighted to see Shimon Peres. I want to thank my friend, Nava Barak, and the Prime Minister for an extraordinary and gracious welcome that I have enjoyed immensely. The hospitality that you have extended my daughter and me will long, long be remembered.

As I was watching the video, I suppose like many of you here, there was another video playing in your heads of other moments that you recall—either in person or through pictures or television—of this extraordinary man whom I consider a personal hero. I thought of the times that the Prime Minister and Leah Rabin and Bill and I would talk together, and the jokes that would pass back and forth between them and among us. I know, as any parent or grandparent would, how our hearts swelled and our eyes filled as we saw again Noah's extraordinary eulogy. I also remember, as Leah does, the moments that we sat together with extraordinary pride watching our husbands move forward, hope against history.

I also remember being accused by the Prime Minister of endangering the peace process because I would not let either the Prime Minister or King Hussein smoke in the White House. When my husband became President, we declared the White House a "no-smoking" zone. It didn't bother me about anyone other than the Prime Minister and the King. But as they would come in and out of the White House, one or the other would turn and chide me that I was sending them out into the cold; I was denying them the comforts of their habits. I was, I have to tell you, often very weak in my resolve, and I would say, "Well, if it will further the effort toward peace, I will rescind the rule, but only as it applies to the two of you!" I also never persuaded him to dance with me. I wish I had!

You know, being here for my fifth trip to Israel, and the fourth since coming to the White House, has filled me with memories of hope and joy and of tragedy and despair. I remember very well our first trip when Bill and I came as private citizens over New Year's in 1981-82, when we spent more than 10 days and were able to travel freely throughout the country. I said to Nava earlier that I am so glad that I had that trip, because it's very different coming to Israel and being able to go from Masada to the Galilee and from Cesarea to Jerusalem, from one end to the other and throughout Tel Aviv and enjoy the nightlife. It's very different coming as a private citizen and coming with an entourage and a motorcade. Because I was so fortunate to come here earlier with Bill, I have such a sense of what it feels like in the streets and the markets and the villages.

I hope some day to return again without all of the accompanying efforts that go into a trip such as mine.

My husband has spoken often of that first trip we took, and he tells the story of his pastor who had come to the Holy Land every year since the 1930's—a man named W. O. Vaught—who told Bill and me very seriously that we had an obligation never to let Israel down because God would never forgive that. Like Bill, I remember those words and strive to live up to them by supporting the long-term peace and security of Israel, and by supporting the goal that Prime Minister Rabin fought for, lived for, and died for. His life was Israel's history and his legacy must be Israel's future.

Like Moses, Yitzhak Rabin brought his people within sight of the promised land of peace and security, but he never got the chance to carry them across. He did not, however, leave them alone. He not only left a legacy being pursued by the Rabin Center, but he also inspired other leaders like Prime Minister Barak. He left behind a road map. The only way to honor him properly is to finish the journey he started. There has never been a better opportunity to do so than now.

When I told a friend of mine that I would be traveling here to Israel to deliver this lecture, he gave me a copy of last week's Torah reading from Genesis 25. You may recall it. It's when Yitzhak and Ishmael are finally reunited after decades of estrangement. They come together in quiet dignity to bury their father, Abraham. Throughout the book of Genesis we see such divisions and enmities overcome by the power of God's true intentions for the inhabitants of this Holy Land. We see Jacob fearing that his brother Esau was coming to murder him, but after years of alienation, they embraced. We see Joseph's brothers fearing retribution and receiving forgiveness.

How many fathers, mothers and children in the Middle East have dreamed of and sacrificed for that kind of reconciliation? We too see that now there is an opportunity to write another chapter in the ongoing lessons of Genesis. It is, yet again, a new beginning. Both sides are moving toward a compromise. For neither side will that be easy. For neither side will that be without pain. But the reward—a chance for a peace once only dreamed of by poets and prophets—far outweighs the cost.

That was the message of Oslo, echoed by President Clinton, Prime Minister Barak, and Chairman Arafat: How we can fulfill Rabin's legacy by bidding farewell to generations of war and ushering in a new century of real and lasting peace? The same must be true on all of Israel's borders so that the peace that now covers some will be a peace that extends to all—Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese.

Now by working for peace, we are not being naïve or soft-headed. That was one of the lessons Prime Minister Rabin taught us all. We recognize, as he did, that peace in the Middle East is not only a moral imperative, but the smartest strategic choice to ensure security for the children of Israel. That doesn't mean that Israel can ever let down her defenses. It doesn't mean that her friends, especially the United States, will ever be relieved of our responsibility to help Israel maintain her military strength.

But Prime Minister Rabin believed that reaching this promised land of peace and security was the best way to protect Israel from the deadly marriage of terrorism at home, and missiles and weapons of mass destruction from abroad. He knew peace would not come easy. How many times, as we saw in the video, have the enemies of peace tried to derail the peace process by targeting sons and daughters, soldiers and prime ministers, by targeting a people's sense of security and humanity? How many times have terrorists and enemies of peace tried to use violence to force a nation and its leaders to throw up their hands in defeat and walk away from the journey?

But one thing we do know—as my husband said from this very stage—we can never permit them to win. If we listen hard tonight, we can almost hear Yitzhak's deep and steady voice repeating some of his favorite sayings: "The coldest peace is better than the warmest war," or "A destroyed house can be rebuilt, a burned-down tree can be replanted, but a young life cannot be replaced."

We can hear him reminding us of all the children, the young soldiers who lost their lives on the road to the promised land. Each name is a powerful reminder of why a secure homeland for the Jewish people is not an abstraction, not a wish, but a necessity.

This morning Nava and I went to Yad Vashem. I saw the million and a half lives representing the children who perished. At the children's museum I saw the toys that young boys and girls clung to through their darkest hours. One in particular caught my attention: A Holocaust survivor named Eva recently gave a doll to the children's museum. This doll, called Gerta, traveled with Eva everywhere during her internment in the concentration camps, and she became a kindred spirit. Eva was very reluctant to let her doll out of her possession, but was later convinced to donate her doll to the museum. I was told by one of the curators there that Eva had a very hard time separating from this reminder of her life, and so she wrote her doll a letter: "Goodbye my doll, Gerta. I am leaving you with a heavy heart. I don't know whether I am doing the right thing by giving you to a strange lady from Yad Vashem. You will continue your existence among the sad possessions and memories of people or children who are strangers to you. Maybe you will be able to tell the people of today, and particularly the children, what you saw and where you were with me. A sad story, but also a cheerful one, because I survived. Dear Gerta, you will be the last witness of a dreadful childhood. May no child anywhere go through anything like that again."

I thought of Eva and Gerta later today when Nava and our daughters and I went to the Western Wall. And tucked between those massive stones was a prayer for all children: "For the children of Israel, for the children of the Middle East, so that none like Eva's letter would ever, ever go through anything like that again."

We saw in the video the great emotion that occurred when those young Israeli paratroopers collapsed and wept against the Western Wall. I thought about the ultimate sacrifices that Prime Minister Rabin saw time and time again as he sent children—15- and 16-year-old children—into battle. I have met parents of soldiers still missing in action. It's hard for me to imagine waiting for word of what happened to one's child—waiting as birthdays go by or high holidays are

marked. I was pleased when my husband signed a law that sends a message to the region that the United States will not rest until we uncover the fate of every single Israeli soldier.

Before coming here this evening, Nava and I visited the Rabin Medical Center and we saw, Leah, the newborn nursery named for you and contributed to by our great friends King Hussein and Queen Noor. We saw mothers cradling their healthy babies—Jewish and Arab. These infants didn't know it yet, but they could become the first generation to grow up in an Israel free from terror and war. But if we are to make that dream a reality, we have some work to do. First and foremost, we should be guided by courageous leaders willing to take risks for peace, willing to endure setbacks, willing to understand as Rabin did that peace is something you make with your enemies—not with your friends.

I can only imagine how pleased he would have been by the events of last week, including the peace rally held in Rabin Square, and how proud he would have been, as people all over the world were, of Prime Minister Barak, who had been told that it was too dangerous for him to come to honor his friend's legacy. But Ehud and Nava went anyway. They stood in the spot from which Rabin had addressed the crowd. Leah was there, and with great emotion Prime Minister Barak looked out at the Israeli flags and the thousands of people refusing to let hatred or fear win and said, "We are not afraid."

We have to stand by leaders, but the real work of peace must be done by citizens. It is that work, day in and day out, that each of us has to do. The United States will do its part. We Americans will honor the peace process by fighting terrorism and intimidation; by helping the parties, not by imposing decisions upon them; by honoring the peace process; by fighting for the foreign aid that helps guarantee Israelis' security and brings prosperity and stability to the West Bank and Gaza. I know the President is very pleased that Republicans and Democrats in Congress are moving toward the approval of the assistance promised at Wye River. So Americans will do all we can to keep faith with Israel. But our peacemakers are not only leaders or diplomats, but ordinary citizens—especially, I would argue, women and children.

In Leah's book about her husband and their life together, she talks about their last day, about how he had been warned about the rally. But there was something else worrying him. He was wondering whether or not people were supporting peace, not just in large crowds, but in the quiet moments around their kitchen tables when they talked with one another or when they encountered each other around street corners. Because he understood that agreements between leaders are the beginning, not the end, of peace. Whether peace takes hold depends upon peace becoming a habit of the heart, shaping the way Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese treat and talk about one another; shaping messages of respect broadcast by their media to their people; shaping the lessons that children learn in their classrooms and the ones their parents tell them as they tuck them into bed at night.

I have been privileged to travel to many countries and meet many citizen peacemakers. Their names will not ever appear in a headline or on a television news show, but they are showing in a very real, daily way what it takes to put generations of hatred behind us. From Northern Ireland to El Salvador to South Africa, I've met with women who have lost sons and fathers, husbands and loved ones; women who had fought each other through terror and in war, but who are now

sitting across tables from one another to help build a common future. Think if you will for a moment of a place like Kigali, Rwanda, where 800,000 women, men and children were slaughtered in the space of a few months. How does one make sense of a future so stained with blood? But I met with Rwandan women not so long ago, and they asked me for only one thing. They didn't ask me for resources from our government; they asked me if I could help them build a playground in the middle of Kigali. They understood that it takes those small steps, those daily acts of courage, and they envisioned a playground where children would play again like children should, and where their parents could once again believe in the future.

A few years ago, I met with a group of women in Bosnia. They were Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. They had come together in the aftermath of that war to rebuild their lives. One of them gave me a sculpture of a woman that I keep in my office in the White House. It's about this tall, and like many women, she is standing very proudly. But embedded in her knee are pieces of shrapnel—real shrapnel—that had been collected off the streets and out of the fields of that conflict—tangible symbols of the losses and the pain endured. But on her heart is her hand, and on her hand is a dove, and on her face is a confident smile. When I look at her, I think that if she could talk, if that small statue could have a voice, she would say something like this: “Despite the past, despite the fact I have shrapnel embedded in my knee, despite the pain I feel every day, I will dream and work for peace for my children.”

That was the goal that Prime Minister Rabin taught all of us to seek, and he knew that it wasn't enough to imagine living without war. We also needed to imagine living with adequate health care, with education, with economic opportunity and dignity. Yesterday I met some young people from the Peres Peace Center who gave me one of their peace calendars. They are selling these calendars to raise money to buy computers to link Israeli youngsters with Palestinians. At ELEM, I met teenagers who had joined the campaign against violence and had found their way off the streets and back to school. I have seen over and over again, both in Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza, a commitment to bringing healthy babies into the world—a commitment to making life better.

One of the most interesting stories I heard today was at the Sha'are Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem. I was told that two infants—one Jewish, one Moslem—were both x-rayed on the same day. When the x-rays came back, they included a strange rectangular outline that had absolutely no medical explanation. It turned out that the mothers of these babies had tucked two small booklets in each of their baby's sheets before sending their baby off to be x-rayed. The mother of the Moslem child had left the Koran, and the mother of the Jewish child had left the book of mysticism that was meaningful to her. All parents have the same concerns, fears, hopes and dreams for their children.

We all know that the work of peace and the work of democracy are neverending. When I talk with people in new democracies around the world, I remind them that our country is still working to perfect our own union and democracy. Whether or not we are successful in seeking and obtaining peace depends on how we see one another and see ourselves. We've heard lectures about morality and ethics, about law and politics, about economics, and all the reasons why peace does make strategic sense. But a few weeks ago, at the White House, my husband and I heard a lecture that had a profound effect on both of us. He mentioned it in his remarks at

Oslo. We had two scientists speaking about two of the most astonishing changes that are occurring in the world as we enter a new century—changes in information technology and in genetics. And the geneticist said to us that despite all of our many outward differences—of race and religion, of ethnicity and tribe, of gender and region—we are still, as human beings, 99.9 percent identical in our genetic makeup. Think about what that means: All the wars, all the violence, all the hatred that has been based on that one-tenth of one percent. Imagine what we could accomplish if, while celebrating our differences, we taught our children to draw strength from that 99.9 percent that makes up our common humanity. Think of the message that would send—from the Balkans to Central Africa to Northern Ireland—to all the places ripped apart by violence and bloodshed. Think of the affirmation of all that we hold dear, if the people of the Middle East are able to defy history and raise their children in peace.

Now I know that during any journey there is always the temptation to turn back. There are always people who fear going forward. I think often of the story in the Bible of Moses leading his people out of Egypt. Now you can imagine people who had been enslaved for generations thinking they were on the way to the Promised Land. But it was hard. There were many obstacles along the way. So when Moses went up to receive the Ten Commandments, what happened? Well, many of the Israelites fleeing from Egypt got together and decided they wanted to go back. Indeed, they needed to go back. They wanted to return, because as bad as things had been, at least it was a known evil. So the “Back to Egypt Committee” was formed. And when Moses came down with the Ten Commandments, he was met by people who said: “This is too hard; we cannot do this anymore. Let’s go back to slavery. At least there we get our bread, we know what our job is, we don’t have to think for ourselves, we don’t have to break any new ground.”

Well that story, as many of the stories in the Bible do, tells us something important about human nature. It describes to us what happens in every generation when there is great change. There are always those who want to form a “Back to Egypt Committee,” or in this case turn back and away from the peace process. But in the end—thank God—the Israelites did not go back. They pressed on for 40 years before reaching the Promised Land. It was only the beginning of a long journey that took the Jewish people to the far corners of the world. It brought them back home again, just 51 years ago, and sent them on to a half century of struggle for peace and security.

Now again a fateful decision lies before the people of Israel and her neighbors. Again we have to ask ourselves, do we follow the path of Moses and Rabin? And again, I trust that the answer is the one that his legacy dictates to us, “that we must press ahead until this Holy Land freely flows, not with blood and tears, but with milk and honey, peace and security.” God bless Yitzhak Rabin and the journey he started us all on.

Thank you very much.