

## a warrior for peace

Yesterday, the State of Israel and the Jewish people lost a visionary and often-underappreciated leader, Shimon Peres. I am not going to repeat a list of his numerous contributions and accomplishments first in helping to found the state of Israel, then in helping to secure it from its enemies, and then in fighting for the deeper security of a lasting peace deal between the Israelis and Palestinians. For those details you can find an obituary and numerous remembrances [here](#).

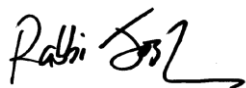
I do want to say that Shimon Peres was a force for hope in the horrific weeks and months following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, when Israeli society was terrified and traumatized. Stepping in for Rabin - whom Peres had pulled into the Oslo Peace process and with whom he earned a Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 - Peres sought a vision of unity and peace in the face of despair. Aimee and I were in Israel at that time and watched in horror as a campaign of terror orchestrated by Hamas sought to turn Israeli society at that deeply vulnerable moment away from the peace process which would have undermined them and all extremist terrorist groups.

They succeeded. The race for Prime Minister tightened through a horrifically bloody spring but the forces of hope seemed to be holding on. On May 29, 1996 I stayed up in my Jerusalem apartment watching Israeli electoral returns as late as I could. When I went to bed late that night, Peres held the lead; when I woke up the following morning Netanyahu, with his starkly different vision for the direction of the country, had overtaken him, winning the election 50.5% to 49.5%. It is a powerful reminder than in a deeply divided country, close elections can have grave and lasting consequences and that every vote counts.

Last April, I stood with a group of Or Hadash congregants around the moving memorial to Yitzhak Rabin in the Tel Aviv square where he was assassinated. There will be no similar memorials to Peres. His work was too nuanced and behind the scenes, and he lived to see an Israel with far less clarity about its future direction than the one that existed in Rabin's time. But his conviction, his tireless energy, his willingness to think outside the box and work with people whom others would not, his deep love for Israel and desire to see it safe and secure, and his passion for peace should all serve as models for us in the coming year of what can be possible.

*Zichrono livrachah* - may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing.

L'shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rabbi Sol" with a stylized flourish at the end.