



YITZHAK RABIN CENTER  
מרכז יצחק רבין

## **Biography of Yitzhak Rabin**

### **Introduction**

When Israelis voted the Labor Party into government in June 1992 with Yitzhak Rabin at its helm, they knew well what they were getting. Here was a man who had been in public life for more than 40 years. When he became prime minister for the first time in 1974, he had been the first native-born Israeli (sabara) to attain the post. His astonishingly successful military record, no-nonsense speaking style, gravelly voice and oddly shy little smile were as familiar to Israelis as would be the mannerisms of a favorite uncle. Yet, in a short span, they would meet a new Yitzhak Rabin – a great war commander and implacable foe of the PLO transformed into a soldier for peace and a Nobel laureate. And so, in November 1995, when this first-ever sabara prime minister became the first-ever Israeli prime minister to be assassinated in office – and by a young Jew – Israelis came to know with horror and grief what they had lost. This was Yitzhak Rabin.

### **Childhood**

Rabin, born in Jerusalem on March 1, 1922, was the son of Nehemiah (born in Ukraine) and Rosa (born in White Russia), who immigrated to Palestine in 1917 and 1919, respectively, as part of the Third Aliya (immigrant wave), determined to settle in Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel). His father worked in the Electric Company and was an active unionist. His mother was active in the Haganah (Jewish self-defense organization) and in the labor movement and was a member of the Tel Aviv Municipal Council.

Rabin attended the School for Workers' Children in Tel Aviv, sponsored by the labor movement, during 1928-35; the intermediary regional school at Kibbutz Givat Hashlosha in 1935-37; and the Kadoorie Agricultural High School, located in the Lower Galilee at the foot of Mt. Tabor, during 1937-40. While at Kadoorie, Yitzhak joined the Haganah.

Upon graduating high school in 1940 he joined the No'ar Ha'oved (Working Youth) training program at Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan north of Haifa.

### **Service in the Haganah and the Palmach**

In 1941 Rabin became one of the first recruits in the Palmach (Assault Companies) founded that year, serving in Company B under Moshe Dayan based in Kibbutz Hanita near the Labanese border. Company B joined with British forces in invading Syria and Lebanon to block a German foothold in the region. Infiltrating into Lebanon in June 1941, Rabin's unit cut the electricity system between Tyre and Sidon. He soon became a full-time commander in the Palmach, and in 1945 was appointed deputy commander of its First Battalion.

On October 10, 1945, the First Battalion broke into the British detention camp at Atlit, south of Haifa, in an attempt to free 200 "illegal" immigrants held there.

On June 29, 1946, a day that became known as Black Saturday, he and others, including his father, were arrested by the British and sent to a detention camp in Rafiah south of Gaza, where they were held for five months.

Freed in November 1946, Rabin was at once appointed commander of the Palmach's Second Battalion, assigned to secure the water line supplying the Negev.

### **War of Independence**

In October 1947 he became the Palmach's chief operations officer, responsible primarily for supply convoys to Jerusalem, which was under siege and cut off from the center of the country.

In April 1948 the Palmach Harel Brigade was established with Rabin as commander. Assigned to defend the corridor leading to Jerusalem, he played a major role in the fierce battles there and in the liberation of the city, during which many of his friends and comrades fell.

From July to December 1948 he served as operations officer under Commander of the Southern Front Yigal Allon, with the rank of lieutenant colonel, masterminding a successful campaign that drove the Egyptians and Jordanians from the Negev desert in Operations Yoav, Lot, Assaf, Horev and Uvdah.

In 1949 he took part in the Israeli-Egyptian armistice talks in Rhodes as representative of the Southern Command in the Israeli delegation headed by Yigael Yadin.

### **Service in the Israel Defense Forces**

Promoted to colonel in 1949, Rabin was appointed commander of the I.D.F.'s first course for battalion commanders, and in 1950 he was named head of the General Staff's Operations Division. One of the most important tasks of the division in the early 1950s was organizing transit camps for over 100,000 new immigrants who began streaming into Israel immediately after independence, many of them from Muslim countries.

Rabin was promoted to the rank of major general in January 1954 and was appointed head of the General Staff Training Division. From 1956 to 1959 he headed the Northern Command, a period of intensive artillery bombardment of the northern settlements in the Galilee and numerous incidents along the Jordan Valley and the Huleh settlements.

In May 1959 he became chief of the Operations Branch, the second highest position in the I.D.F., serving under Chief-of-Staff Chaim Laskov.

In January 1961 he was named deputy chief of staff under General Zvi Zur.

Rabin was appointed the seventh chief of staff in January 1964, a post he held until January 1968. The I.D.F.'s state of readiness under his command was put to the test in the Six-Day War of June 1967, from which it emerged with a stunning victory, defeating Arab armies on three fronts and occupying the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

### **Diplomatic Service**

Leaving military service in 1968, Rabin was appointed ambassador to the United States, a post he held for five years until 1973, during the administrations of Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. With Cold War rivalry at its height, Rabin considered Israel's relationship with the U.S. of supreme importance to balance strong Soviet Union support for the Arab countries. He focused on fostering solid U.S.-Israel ties, including the acquisition of American arms and military equipment, along with opening a peace process with the Arab states. He was involved in such diplomatic initiatives as the 1969 Rogers Plan, which led to a

cease-fire between Israel and Egypt, and the search for a permanent agreement with Egypt with the mediation of the U.S. and the assistance of U.N. Ambassador Gunnar Jarring.

### **Political Service**

Joining the Labor Party in September 1973, Rabin was chosen 23<sup>rd</sup> on its list for the Knesset elections in December 1973 and was considered a candidate for minister of defense. With the electoral victory of Labor, he was appointed minister of labor in Prime Minister Golda Meir's government in March 1974. However, in the wake of the Agranat Commission Report on deficient preparedness in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Meir resigned in April 1974. Rabin was elected head of the Labor Party and its candidate to take over the role of prime minister, beating Shimon Peres. Gaining a vote of confidence in the Knesset, he became prime minister on June 3, 1974.

### **Main Events in Rabin's First Term as Prime Minister, 1974-77**

Rabin conducted stubborn and exhausting negotiations over post-war interim agreements with Egypt and Syria, mediated by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in his famous shuttle diplomacy. The second interim agreement with Egypt, signed in September 1975, in which Israel withdrew from part of the strategic passes and the oil fields in Sinai, marked the beginning of the process that eventually led to the Camp David Accords.

Israel also signed an understanding with the U.S. guaranteeing American support for Israeli interests in the international arena and the renewal of American aid.

A series of secret meetings were held between Prime Minister Rabin and King Husayn of Jordan and with King Hassan of Morocco in efforts to promote peace.

The Entebbe Operation in July 1976, during which Israeli hostages on a plane hijacked by the P.L.O. were rescued from Uganda by the I.D.F., demonstrated Israel's refusal to capitulate to terrorism.

In April 1977, Yitzhak Rabin resigned as prime minister in the wake of the revelation that his wife, Leah, retained a bank account in the U.S. from the time her husband had served as ambassador there. (At the time, operating a foreign currency account was a misdemeanor under Israeli currency law.)

### **In the Opposition**

Rabin, at his own request, was placed in the 20<sup>th</sup> slot in the Labor list for the Knesset elections, serving in the background as a member of Knesset until 1984. He lost the position of leader of the party to Shimon Peres before the Knesset elections of 1981. During this period he devoted a great deal of time to his family and to writing essays on current affairs, politics and strategy.

### **As Minister of Defense, 1984-90**

The national unity government agreed upon in 1984 chose Rabin as minister of defense, a post he held for six years until the collapse of the second unity government in 1990. One of his major tasks was disengaging the I.D.F. from a war of attrition in Lebanon, where it had become mired, and establishing a narrow security zone in southern Lebanon. He also canceled the Lavi aircraft project developed by Israel Aircraft Industries and constricted the defense budget as part of efforts to stabilize the economy and halt inflation.

The outburst of the Intifada (the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories) in December 1987 caught Israel by surprise and rapidly escalated to alarming proportions. Rabin initially adopted an iron-fist policy to suppress the uprising and instructed the I.D.F. to respond to Palestinian assaults with determination. When King Hussein unexpectedly announced that Jordan was relinquishing its sovereignty over the West Bank, Rabin realized that only the Palestinians could be the real partners in any settlement.

Seeking credible channels of communication with them, he joined Shimon Peres's peace efforts, including a meeting with King Hussein in 1988 during which the London Document (an outline for a proposed peace treaty between Jordan and Israel) was drawn up. Early in 1989 he presented his plan for negotiations with the Palestinians, which became the foundation for the Madrid International Peace Conference and the start of the peace process. The basic idea was to reach an agreement with the local Palestinian population based on elections and broad autonomy during an interim period, in return for an end to the Intifada. The plan was adopted by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

### **Prime Minister, 1992-95**

The Labor Party, led by Yitzhak Rabin, won the Knesset elections of June 1992. Once in office, he immediately focused on the prospect of a peace agreement with the Palestinians as his top priority. Although top-secret negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in Washington failed, in late 1992 and early 1993 further negotiations gathered momentum in Oslo, resulting, on August 20, 1993, in the signing of the Oslo Accords in Norway.

On September 13, 1993, the historic Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles was signed at the White House in Washington. Known as the Oslo-A Agreement, as well as “Gaza-Jericho First,” the Declaration guaranteed Palestinians self-rule in the territories for a period of five years. In the first phase Israel would pull out of the Gaza Strip and Jericho city, and would later leave agreed areas of the West Bank, and the Palestinians would hold elections.

The Gaza-Jericho Agreement, which granted the Palestinians autonomy in Gaza and Jericho, was signed on May 4, 1994. The I.D.F. evacuated the areas agreed.

A tripartite summit in Washington between Yitzhak Rabin, King Husayn of Jordan and U. S. President Bill Clinton, held in Washington on July 25, 1994, resulted in the Washington Declaration, which marked the official end of hostilities between Israel and Jordan. The signing of a comprehensive peace treaty between the two countries was held on October 12, 1994, at the Arava borderline between them.

On December 10, 1994, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat.

The signing of the Oslo-B Agreement by Israel and the P.L.O. in Washington on September 28, 1995 expanded the West Bank areas under the control of the new Palestinian Authority.

On Saturday night, November 4, 1995, at the close of a peace rally at Kings of Israel Square in Tel Aviv attended by tens of thousands, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by gunshot by a young Jewish student.