

Was Rabin a Mason?

Was Rabin a Mason? - The Making of a Myth
by Leon Zeldis, FPS

In the February 1996 issue of *The Philaethes*, Bro. Ron Berger, MPS, published an article entitled "Brother Yitzhak Rabin 1922-1995", in which he claimed as a fact that the late Prime Minister of Israel was a Freemason. After relating that Mr. Rabin was made a Mason "on sight" in 1968 by the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel at the time, Bro. Shalom Kassan (deceased), Bro. Berger claimed this information was communicated to him by Bro. Zvi Neustein (also deceased). He himself stated that "no one in the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel was ever willing to confirm or deny the story officially, so that we can only rely on hear-say and clues".

Bro. Berger then went on to adduce as "proof" that the obituary notices published by Grand Lodge refer to Mr. Rabin, while the Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Ephraim Fuchs, in a funeral oration, called the prime minister of Israel our brother. The author asks rhetorically: a slip of the tongue?

Finally, Bro. Berger wonders whether Yitzhak Rabin's Masonic involvement was conducive to his good relations with President Clinton (a member of DeMolay in his youth), King Hussein of Jordan (Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Jordan) and Prince Hassan (Grand Master).

If Bro. Berger's opus had been an isolated instance of a personal opinion based on shaky evidence, I might have let it pass. However, a number of publications have appeared on the subject, threatening to create a full-blown myth about the masonic character of Israel's late prime minister, and this has moved me to put the record straight, and concentrate on whatever facts we have available, eschewing unsubstantiated evidence insofar as possible.

Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister and Defense Minister of Israel, was murdered by an assassin's bullets on November 4, 1995. The crime produced a strong emotional reaction in all circles of Israeli society, and also abroad. Although in life Rabin had been a bitterly controversial figure in Israeli politics, his death united most of the country's population in grief and condemnation of the crime. In such circumstances, as in other times of crisis, most Israelis close ranks and the ancient saying "kol Israel haverim" (all Jews are close friends) becomes a fact. Grand Master Ephraim Fuchs was obviously expressing this general feeling when he referred to the late prime minister as "our brother" - no slip of the tongue.

In an obituary advertisement published by the Grand Lodge in the English-language newspaper *Jerusalem Post*, Mr. Rabin was again referred to as Brother. Somebody - it has been impossible to determine who - "improved" the text by adding the word Mason.

Basing himself on the advertisement quoted above, R.W. Bro. Werner Ansorge, Grand Representative of the United Grand Lodges of Germany near the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel, sent an urgent communication to the UGL of Germany, and this in turn advised all Lodges in Germany that the murdered Prime Minister of Israel had been a Freemason. The January/February issue of *Humanitat*, the German Masonic Journal, carried Rabin's portrait on its front page, on a background of the Grand Seal of the GL of Israel, and the title "Bruder Rabin" (Brother Rabin). An article by R.W. Bro. Werner Ansorge on page 5 of the same journal was entitled "Shalom, Friend and Brother". Other Grand Lodges, as well, repeated this information to their respective Lodges.

So much for the developing myth. Let us now examine the facts.

It is a fact that for many years rumors circulated in Israel's Masonic circles about the possible Masonic character of Mr. Rabin. There were two kinds of rumors: the first, as reported by Bro. Berger, claimed that the Grand Master had made Rabin a Mason "on sight" before taking up his post as Israel's Ambassador to the United States. The other rumor claimed that Mr. Rabin had joined the Fraternity in the United States, during his tenure there as Ambassador.

A thorough search of Grand Lodge records failed to turn up any document relating to the supposed ceremony of making a Mason "on sight". Furthermore, as far as it has been possible to ascertain, Mr. Rabin never visited any Israeli Lodge nor had any communication either with a Lodge or with the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel.

It should be pointed out that in Israel there is no religious animosity against Freemasonry. On the contrary, there are many Rabbis who are active members of the Fraternity, and until a short time ago, the Lodge in Eilat actually held its meetings in a room at the local Rabbinical Academy (Yeshiva). This means that there would be no political reason to keep secret Mr. Rabin's initiation, if it had taken place.

If in fact Mr. Rabin had been made a Mason "on sight", this would have been done for the express purpose of enabling him to establish contact with American masons at a fraternal level. This would have been documented either by his affiliation to a local lodge in the United States or by him at least visiting lodges there.

The Grand Secretary of the GL of Israel, R.W.Bro. Israel Doni, requested from the Grand Lodges of New York, Washington D.C. and California (where, presumably, Mr. Rabin could have been initiated or affiliated while serving as Israeli Ambassador) to search their records for any sign of Mr. Rabin's having been initiated, affiliated or ever having visited Lodges in their respective jurisdictions. Again, no such record was found. A suggestion was made, that he might have been initiated under an alias, though no reason for such subterfuge could be advanced.

A further circumstance that must be taken into consideration, when judging the credibility of the rumor about Mr. Rabin's being made a Mason "on sight" is the fact that no such ceremony has ever been recorded in the history of Israel's Grand Lodge. Not only that, but Mr. Rabin would have had to receive all three degrees simultaneously, since American Lodges work in the third degree and only Master Masons are regarded as full members of the Fraternity. Again, awarding the three degrees at one time is something unheard of in our Constitution.

In order to make use of his Masonic status, Mr. Rabin would have needed an official document from the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel, certifying his Masonic condition, degree, and name of the Lodge to which he belonged. However, if the ceremony was conducted by Grand Lodge officers only, and not within a Lodge, what Lodge would he belong to? Would he have received also Grand Lodge (Past Master) status? This defies credibility.

To sum up, if we are to believe the rumor of Mr. Rabin being made a Mason "at sight" we must believe that:

- a) The Grand Master and some GL officers conducted a secret ceremony, of which no records were kept, awarding the three degrees of Symbolic Freemasonry.
- b) Mr. Rabin received a Grand Lodge certificate without indicating membership in any Lodge.
- c) Mr. Rabin did not make use of his newly won Masonic status, nor did he make any contact with the Grand Lodge of Israel or any of its individual Lodges after his return to Israel.

Obviously, such sequence of events is highly implausible. The conclusion, then, must be that - until further satisfactory evidence is found - we must reserve judgment on the validity of the rumors concerning Mr. Rabin's Masonic status, and render a verdict of "not proven".

A final consideration is not out of place. Even if we were to assume that the rumors were true, and that Mr. Rabin did in fact receive all three degrees of symbolic Freemasonry in a special ceremony (or that he was initiated in an American lodge under an alias), what role did Masonry play in his life? How significant was Freemasonry for him? His never having visited an Israeli Lodge and his lack of communication with the Grand Lodge of Israel and its Officers demonstrate that the answer is, very little. Compare the conduct of active Freemasons such as President Truman (who served as WM of the Missouri Lodge of Research while in office as President of the United States), or Salvador Allende of Chile, who after being elected President attended Lodge meetings and maintained his involvement with his country's Freemasonry.

The late Yitzhak Rabin was a world-known political figure, and his being or not being a Mason will neither add to nor diminish his reputation. On the other hand, we should be extremely careful not to give ground to the accusation of trying to capitalize on historical celebrities to enhance our Fraternity's standing. This has been done in the past, but we should learn from past mistakes and not repeat them.

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