Where Were You When?
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Temple Judea - 10/2/01

A question: "Where were you when _____? Depending on your generation and perhaps your nationality how we each answer that question tells a tremendous amount about who we are and what we consider to be the defining moment in our lives. For many in the congregation tonight, I imagine that what has become the classic test of American identity still holds true. "Where were you, when President Kennedy was shot?" That question and answer is the clarion call of a generation of Americans who saw their hopes and perhaps their innocence crumble in what by historical standards qualifies as nearly an instant.

For some in this room, the answer may hearken back to an earlier time, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the day that would, as Roosevelt predicted, "live in infamy". For others it may be the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. or the shootings at Kent State that finally confirmed what many had suspected but hoped would not hold to be true, that America was imploding, on the brink perhaps of revolution.

For my generation, those that grew up in the simmering heat of the Cold War, it may have been the destruction of the Berlin Wall, or the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger. If you ask us, we may all answer differently. Like the very decade we grew up in, the children of the 80's lack a defining moment or cause. The cynic in me might even suggest the release of the single, "We Are The World", and the realist would tell you the first day that we learned about AIDS. But no one moment stands out, no one moment defines us.

For those who have grown up at the tail end of the 90s and the teens who crowd our malls and live in a decade that doesn't lend itself so easily to a name like the 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s. We can only hope that the most harrowing and therefore defining event of their generation will be September 11th, 2001. God forbid that something should ever eclipse that day for its horror and loss of life in the memory of any generation. Indeed it is a day that we will all remember, have been shaped and defined by, one that also fits Roosevelt's prediction of infamy.

But with the focus and clarity provided by the lapse of time, there is another date that like September 11th, and all the days mentioned before it stole our innocence, forever changed our view of the world and how we live our lives. It was November 4, 1995, six years ago this Sunday, it was the day Yitzchak Rabin was assassinated.

The date itself does not stand out like December 7th, or 9/11. November 4, 1995 does not enjoy the good fortune of a catchy name. But like December 7th or September 11th, it was a date that forever changed the world. In the words of Don Mclean (or Madonna for those who didn't realize American Pie was a remake, or for that matter that it was a song having nothing to do with a movie or pie) November 4, 1992 was the day the music died. It was quite possibly the very last day that the Palestinians and the Israelies were on a path toward peace and not toward war. Looking back it was not so much a day when innocence was lost, because it was a peace being made by soldiers and statesmen, but rather a day when hope was lost, when we realized, for some in an instant, that we could not stem the flow of violence, that the cycle of attack and retribution, would spiral out of control. The prophet speaks of a day when justice will flow like a mighty stream and war will be no more. It was for me the day that I first felt that the

stream may have finally dried up, that the land in which the seed of peace had been planted, would endure a drought of ideas and peace makers, a harsh climate in which it peace would not grow, and the seed would not survive. The day hope died.

We are the people of the book, we who read of our history and the story of our people every Saturday without fail or interruption. We who celebrate the cycles of life with ancient rituals and long held traditions; we would do well to recall this date, November 4, 1995 along with all the other dates that so define our lives and our world view.

In the shadow of the destruction of September 11th we have seen our world forever changed. We will never open our mail the same way again. We cannot board planes without looking each passenger in the eye, to interrogate rather than recognize them. We see firefighters, policemen, even steel workers in a new heroic light. Is this the nation that only eight years ago, debated flag burning? We have changed and been changed, that is for certain, our innocence has been lost, and maybe in that something good may come of something so bad, we needed to grow up and get serious about the evils that exist in our world, those that raged beyond our borders, off our radar. But what of our hope? Our belief that good can triumph over evil, not only because it has more bombs and bullets, but that good triumphs in the end because it is just and it is right. That is not innocence, it is not ignorance, it is Hatikvah, it is the hope of our people, and needs to be the hope of our nation.

When Rabin was shot, hope was shot as well, when he died, I believe that we allowed hope to die along with him. They don't speak much of real peace in Israel any more, they speak of the absence of violence, the withdrawal of troops. No one talks

about beating swords into plow shares, just putting the swords down, but keeping them close at hand.

We must find hope again, in Israel and in this present conflict as well. On every side, in every camp, our and the enemy we must at least identify a way out that is not the total destruction of the other. We may not be there yet, a time of peace may be far off in the distance, but we must at the very least identify what peace will look like. We must at the very least state in terms that those of good intention and reason can believe in what peace might be. We must have at least that, something to hope for, and something to believe in beyond our individual abilities to destroy the other.

That was Yitzhak Rabin, he did not bring an end to war, and he did not bring true and enduring peace. But he represented the hope of peace, the hope of an Israel without war. It was never a task that he would complete, not if he had lived to be 120, it was simply a task that he began, he willed it into being, and left it for us to work on and complete. May we once again identify and enjoy the hope of peace. May we be a generation that is defined by our great potential to bring about a world of peace. So that in 20 or 30 years when they ask our kids our grandkids, where were you when? The answer can be where were you when the last war was ended? Where were you when peace broke out all over? Where were you when all hope was restored?!