for the disposal of the prime minister of Israel. Avital was appalled."

The World Likud (an extension of the Israeli party) swamped Orthodox synagogues in the U.S. with leaflets assailing the Israeli government. Rabbi Mordechai Friedman, head of the Orthodox American Board of Rabbis, took up the banner by charging in radio and t.v. interviews that, "Rabin's democracy is persecuting the settlers" and that, "The Israeli Army has been transformed into the ultra radical left wing Rabin/Peres militia." Rabbi Moshe Tendler, a professor at Yeshiva University and respected authority on the halacha, informed the media that according to Jewish religious law anyone perceived as a *rodef* should be killed.

On June 19, 1995, addressing a convention of the International Rabbinical Coalition for Israel, an organization of Orthodox rabbis dedicated to saving the occupied territories for Israel, Rabbi Abraham Hecht, head of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, declared that surrendering any part of the biblical Land of Israel is a violation of Jewish religious law and, thus, assassinating Rabin, and all who assist him, is both permissible and necessary. The authors note that, "Some of the rabbis supported Hecht and actually signed a statement that in their view Rabin was a *rodef*. Others were stunned by his pronouncement of such a dictum in public, visited his Brooklyn office and implored him to retract the statement. But Hecht was adamant. 'I do not represent myself but the Jewish law,' he told them, 'and the concession of territory is a grave crime in Judaism.'"

Extreme Action

Rabbi Hecht would not be silenced. In August 1995 he used the platform of the *Jewish Press* to publish an open letter "to all the Rabbis in the U.S.A." confirming that, "The Torah permits the most extreme action against those who would harm fellow Jews." He also issued a declaration that the Israeli officers sent to the U.S. to explain the Oslo peace plan "are not wanted here and we must be prepared to expose them for what they are: enemies of the Jewish state and the Jewish people." On October 9, 1995, *New York Magazine* asked Hecht how he would feel if someone were to conclude from his June statement that he was entitled to murder Rabin, Hecht replied: "I wouldn't feel at all . . . Rabin is not a Jew any longer . . . All I said was that according to Jewish law, any person ... who willfully, consciously, intentionally hands over human bodies or human property or the human wealth of the Jewish people to an alien people is guilty of the sin for which the penalty is death. And . . . it says very clearly, if a man kills him, he has done a good deed."

After Yigal Amir acted upon the ultra-Orthodox agitation to remove Yitzhak Rabin from the scene and thereby bring the peace process to an end, he was hailed as a hero in many quarters. A resident of the ultra-Orthodox stronghold of Bnei Brak stood before t.v. cameras and declared: "There is no mourning here. Yitzhak Rabin was not one of us." In Tapuach and Yishar, two West Bank settlements, pictures of Amir were hung on the walls at parties celebrating the "miracle." When word of the assassination reached the large West Bank settlement of Ariel, participants at a political assembly stood up and applauded. In the Yeshiva of the Jewish Idea in Jerusalem, young men embraced one another on hearing the news. In the Orthodox study group at Bar-Ilan University, in which Amir had been a participant, students called him "a saint."

Support For Amir

A question in the 1996 high school matriculation examination in citizenship prompted many essays indicating support for Yigal Amir and his motives. Two of the teachers grading these exams spoke out about the answers of students from religious high schools and sought to publish them. But the Ministry of Education and Culture, then headed by Minister Zevulun Hammer of the National Religious Party, forbade them to do so. Bar-Ilan University sociologist Nissan Rubin, himself of moderate political views, declared: "There's a feeling among the religious public that Rabin's death was a miracle. Citing ancient Jewish myths of miraculous rescue . . . Just as the Jews were always saved from destruction at the last minute — an allusion to the parting of the Red Sea during the Exodus and to the 11th hour rescue of the Jews from Persia from the wicked Haman, so now people are saying a miracle has occurred."

The depth of Israel's cultural divide may be seen in the fact that Yigal Amir and those who embraced his act of murder are not a small, isolated fringe, but a large segment of Israeli society. Hebrew University sociologist Moshe Lissak states that, "Yigal Amir grew out of the mainstream, not the margins. What is referred to as the 'ideological fringe' is actually very broad. We're speaking of a variety of groups — social networks — some of which speak and write on a high level. They share a good degree of common ground, and they live and act in contiguous circles. They are not isolated or reclusive elements, and there is a big difference between them and the Kahanist thugs."

Murderer Came From Among Us

Rabbi Yehudah Amital, the founder of Meimad, a small movement of politically moderate religious nationalists, said that, "The murderer came from among us, out of religious Zionism and Judaism, and we cannot say that 'our hands have not shed this blood.' Rather than be a tempering influence, many of our rabbis have been a radicalizing one, creating a political dogma and a public mood that made the murder possible. Political extremism has been dressed up as religion. Not only did the Prime Minister's murderer come from among us, but Baruch Goldstein, the murderer in the Cave of the Patriarchs, did too. That the religious community brushed off that slaughter . . . shows that its moral sensibility is flawed . . . The decline began when the rabbis chose to turn a blind eye to the attacks on Arabs that eventually led to acts of murder . . ."

Authors Karpin and Friedman report that, "Historians are likely to characterize the post-Rabin period as a time of deep anxiety. There are many indications that racist and separatist philosophies are gaining ground, especially among . . . the national religious population. One particularly troubling development is the recent waves of verbal assaults on the High Court of Justice by religious circles . . . Knesset Member Aharon Cohen of the ultra-Orthodox Shas Party, which in the past decade has grown from a marginal political force to a major power, characterized the court's justices as 'foreign priests of modern primitive idolatry.' Shas's spiritual mentor, former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, went a step further in urging all Israelis to boycott secular courts 'which are not for Jews,' and agree to be judged only before rabbinical tribunals."

In the wake of the assassination, the authors argue, Israeli society refused to properly confront the forces which brought it about. The commission headed by Meir Shamgar to investigate Rabin's murder "held back from scrutinizing the factors responsible . . . In effect, the report reduced the murder of the prime minister from a complex historical event to a simple lapse in security arrangements . . . Justice Shamgar had taken a similarly restrictive approach to circumstances two years earlier when he had chaired the commission investigating Baruch Goldstein's massacre . . . In that instance too the panel confined itself to a strict elucidation of the facts and performance of the security personnel, rather than an examination of the religious, social and political conditions that had fueled the attack."

Security Failure

Israeli security, the authors point out, is indeed a subject of legitimate criticism. They write of its "failure to acknowledge the new circumstances triggered by the Oslo Agreement: the possibility that the nationalist and messianist indoctrination of Orthodox youth, for more than twenty years, would lead at least some of them to reject the principle of democratic rule and resort to the use of force."

Shabak, Israel's security agency, concentrated on a potential threat to Rabin from Arab extremists, not their Jewish counterparts. In fact, the authors write, "Shabak misread the climate of violence. It did not know, for example, that there was talk of murdering the prime minister at the Sabbath conclaves organized for Bar-Ilan students by Yigal Amir. It was unaware that rabbis had issued judgments of *din moser* and *din rodef*. It did not maintain surveillance over most of the groups of zealots that were known to be gathering in settlements and yeshivas . . . The media, no less than the Shabak subscribed to the axiom that no Jew would go to the lengths of murdering another Jew for political or ideological ends. The notion was too grotesque to contemplate. Throughout the summer the media had routinely covered the wave of right-wing demonstrations but barely noticed the indictment against Rabin personally had reached intolerable proportions. Most of the vitriolic statements were unearthed only after the assassination . . ."

Silence of Those In Authority

The silence of those in positions of authority in Israel about the gathering storm of religious fanaticism preceding the assassination helped to create the atmosphere in which such an event could occur. Similarly, the silence of major Jewish organizations and prominent spokesmen in the United States in the face of the promotion of hatred and violence on the part of those in the Orthodox community who were willing to go to any lengths to bring the peace process to a halt tells us a great deal about the lack of moral courage which masquerades as leadership.

Much of the research for this important book was done in connection with the documentary film "The Road To Rabin Square," which was the first attempt to present an in-depth picture of the campaign of incitement that preceded the assassination.

Discussing the achievement of authors Karpin and Friedman, the respected Israeli author Amos Elon writes that, "*Murder In The Name Of God* does two things: It offers an excellent account of the sinister cabal staged by reckless politicians, bogus rabbis and other mystagogues on both sides of the Atlantic that led to the 'religious' murder of Yitzhak Rabin. At the same time, Michael Karpin and Ina Friedman draw a frightening picture of a sick society (and a deeply flawed political system) that allowed this cabal to mature, and today sits by in equanimity as Israel is pushed back from the brink of peace to the black hole of history." •

WHERE DO OUR LOYALTIES LIE?
(continued from page 4)

for centuries. The particular version used in the United Synagogue, as revised by Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz in 1935, asks that the Queen and her counsellors 'may uphold the peace of the realm, advance the welfare of the nation, and deal kindly and truly with all Israel'; and the version used in the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues ends on this note: 'May we all help to fashion in this country a society that excels in freedom and justice, tolerance and compassion, so that it may be a force for righteousness and peace in the life of humanity'. The weekly recitation of such prayers has no doubt played a part in keeping alive the patriotic sentiments of those who have heard them.

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