

Prime Minister Rabin: Our community reacts

By Laura Bernell

Sunday morning after news of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin had reached the South Bay, Rabbi Daniel Pressman found a pot of white flowers on the steps of Congregation Beth David. With it, a handwritten note expressed condolences for this "tragic event which

transcends religious differences." The note was signed only, "A Christian." That same morning, Chairman of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors Mike Honda drove over to Temple Emanu-El to offer his sympathy, and happened upon about 200 youngsters sharing their thoughts and feelings about the assassination. The sight reaffirmed his faith in the Jewish people.

"The assassination hasn't changed my views about the Jewish community," Honda said in a later interview. "It's not a revelation to me that there are differences of opinion, often passionate differences. I've always seen the Jewish people as a very embracing and inclusive community."

Now that our "passionate differences" have undeniably imploded, the Jewish community is endeavoring to repair itself, to in fact be "embracing and inclusive," despite differences among its Israeli parties and American movements. As Zevulun Hammer, a former education minister and leader of the rightist National Religious Party in Israel said, "The struggle for the Land of Israel must not lead to Civil War. The Unity of Israel is as much a value as the Land of Israel." (*New York Times*, November 11, 1995)

Language is a significant force in promoting and preserving Jewish unity, local leaders believe. "There's a real need now to avoid using inflammatory language and to realize that language during these times is very powerful. Using the word, *traitor*,



In his last appearance before a Jewish organization in the U.S., Prime Minister Rabin presents President Clinton with the first Isaiah Award in recognition of Clinton's efforts "to hasten the prophet Isaiah's vision of peace for all people." The event was the meeting of top leaders of UJA and its sister organizations in other countries, called the International Leadership Reunion.

—UJA Press Service Photo by Robert A. Cumins

Richard Wittenberg, Executive of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, sees similarities between the inflammatory rhetoric some connect to Rabin's assassination and terrorist acts within our own borders. "I was very much aware of the contentiousness and very angry at the militant right [in Israel] and the kind of rhetoric that I believe led to the Oklahoma bombing," Wittenberg said last week.

Local leaders agree that strong support, by American Jews, of the elected government of Israel is another key to repairing Jewish unity. "Israel is a modern democracy, not a theocracy. The settlers have decided to flaunt the law and the government, but the law must be obeyed," said Ruth Snorer, former chair of the

American community has not been doing what it should have been: to show support for Israel, which means for the government of Israel and its policies. We're allowing the American Congress to believe Jews don't care about the Peace Treaty," Rabbi Aron said.

To many, the orthodox community represents some of the more factious and vitriolic aspects of the Jewish community. However, the leader of Am Echad orthodox congregation in San Jose, Rav Raphael Lapin, believes "there's a time for debate and dissent, and that time is *before* a decision is made. Once a decision is made, a man of character supports that decision 100 percent, because after that, dissension can become very undermining and destructive."