



April 19, 2007

Translation

**Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Speech at the Ceremony Marking 60 Years Since
Feinstein and Barazani Faced the Gallows**

Honorable Mayor of Jerusalem, my dear friend Uri Lupoliansky,
My friend, Harry Hurwitz, Chairman of the Menachem Begin Center,
Herzl Makov, Director General of the Begin Heritage Center,
The Feinstein and Barazani Families,
The Goodwin Family, to who we are so grateful for this special gesture,
Families of Olei Hagardom [Those Who Went to the Gallows] and the Underground Fighters
who are here,
Museum Department Heads and Representatives of the Ministry of Defense,
Distinguished Guests,

I must say that as I stand here in the courtyard of the Underground Prisoners Museum and hear what has been said here and the songs which were sung here, I cannot but express how profoundly touched I am, since these songs and this heritage have been part of my life from the day I was born in the Shoni Fort near Jabotinsky River, where the heroes of the Irgun, the partners in the struggle of those who went to the gallows and many others who are with us here today, lived and fought.

The sound of the explosion which emanated from the death row cell on that night echoes in our national memory.

We are a people who remember, and in the tapestry of our lives there are moments which are eternal. Such a moment was that in which Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani chose to take their fate into their own hands.



At that moment, it is as if Jewish history held its breath, looked at both young men drawing the improvised grenades closer to their bodies, and listened in great pain to the pounding of their final heartbeats.

Like many others, I too grew up hearing the heroic tale of Feinstein and Barazani: their images are deeply engraved in my memory – the determined and powerful look of Moshe Barazani, and the calm and confident look on Meir Feinstein's handsome face. They, who were in fact so young, became the heroes of our youth.

Feinstein, a member of the Irgun, and Barazani, who was a member of the Lehi, were caught by the British when they fought for our freedom. They were taken captive as fighters, and faced court martial – predatory, cruel and merciless. Despite their youth, they would not be deterred. "You will not frighten us with hangings and you will not succeed in destroying us," Moshe Barazani stated before the court.

"A regime of hanging trees is the regime you wish to use to rule this country, which is meant to serve as a beacon for humanity as a whole," said Meir Feinstein in court, "and in your idiotic villainy," he continued, "you assume that, through this regime you will succeed in breaking our people's spirit, the people for which this entire country was a gallows. You were wrong. Realize that you have encountered steel, steel which was forged with the fire of love and hatred, love of the homeland and freedom, and hatred of slavery and of the invader."

The strength which they radiated was immense. There is a reason that the poet Natan Alterman wrote of them the following lines:

"In hours such as these, the battle is lost by
the enemy.
Who gnashes his teeth.
For such an hour, that burns for a reason,
were designated the two dead."

Distinguished Guests,

The life stories of Feinstein and Barazani ended in the darkness of a death row cell in the Central Prison in Jerusalem. However, even through the darkness, when the evil wind of the



end of the Mandate Period blew through the Jewish *yishuv* in the Land of Israel, a ray of light pierced through. Because underneath the story of the national and heroic struggle, a personal story was also woven, a human story of mutual respect, almost friendship, between Feinsein and Barazani, the condemned, and Sergeant Thomas Henry Goodwin, the British guard who was charged with watching them.

They liked him, and even planned to fulfill Samson's cry, "Let my soul die with the Philistines," through the grenades which were smuggled into to their cell. They eventually decided not to harm him – since they were not acting out of hatred for their fellows.

Mere minutes before their deaths, Meir Feinsein gave the British guard a Bible, illustrated with etchings by the French artist, Gustav Doré. And he added the moving and chilling inscription:

"To the British soldier as you stand guard. Before we go to the gallows, accept this Bible as a memento and remember that we stood in dignity and marched in dignity. It is better to die with a weapon in hand than to live with hands raised."

Today, Sergeant Goodwin's son is fulfilling his father's wish to return the Bible to the Feinsein family. One cannot help but be moved.

We are a people who sanctify life; we love the good in the world and its beauty. We are not a vengeful and vindictive people; we are not out for blood. However, on one thing we cannot compromise – on our freedom, on our basic right as a people to be ourselves, on our freedom to continue to believe in the human spirit and live in accordance with our world view and in the light of our culture. This was the desire of Feinsein and Barazani, what they fought for. And within the storm of the battle in which they were, under the shadow of the gallows, when they sang in their last hours of life *Adon Olam* [a Hebrew song], and our national anthem, they also spread seeds of hope – of faith in the goodness of people.

This day, when the Bible is being returned to the State of Israel, proves that not only the sounds of explosion remain from that night of the new month of Iyar. This day proves that hope also echoes.