

## Rodef

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A *rodef* (Hebrew: רודף, lit. "pursuer"; pl. רודפים, *rodfim*), in traditional Jewish law, is one who is "pursuing" another to murder him or her. According to Jewish law, such a person must be killed by any bystander after being warned to stop and refusing. The source for this law is the Tractate Sanhedrin in the Babylonian Talmud, page 73a, which begins:

And these are the ones whom one must save even with their lives [i.e., killing the wrongdoer]: one who pursues his fellow to kill him [*rodef achar chavero le-horgo*], and after a male or a betrothed maiden [to rape them]; but one who pursues an animal, or desecrates the Sabbath, or commits idolatry are not saved with their lives.

This law, the *din rodef* ("law of the pursuer"), is significant as one of the few provisions in Jewish law permitting extrajudicial killings.

The allowance to kill the *rodef* does not apply, however, in a case where lesser means would prevent the innocent's murder.[1]

Furthermore, according to the RaMBaM, killing a *rodef* who may have been stopped by lesser means constitutes murder, though the punishment for a murderer in this case is not dealt out by *beit din*.[2]

## Modern controversy

### Yitzhak Rabin

In recent years, a number of rabbis have allegedly suggested that various public figures could qualify as *rodfim*, arguably encouraging one to kill. Perhaps most notoriously, former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was branded a *rodef* by some for the Oslo Accord,[3] an agreement for which he was assassinated in 1995. The assassin, Yigal Amir, subsequently justified his actions partly on the basis of *din rodef*, under the assumption that making concessions to the Palestinian Authority would endanger Jewish lives.[4]

The Oslo Accords were controversial within Israel and divided the population due to the extensive change in government policy regarding negotiations with then Israeli designated terrorist organizations, such as the PLO.[5]

According to Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Yigal Amir's interpretation of *din rodef* is a gross distortion of Jewish law and tradition.

First of all, the law of the pursuer only applies to a spontaneous act, whereas Yigal Amir planned this assassination for two years. Secondly, the law of the pursuer is only intended to save a potential victim from imminent death. There is absolutely no proof that withdrawing from certain territories will directly lead to the death of any Jews. On the contrary, Prime Minister Rabin, over half the members of the Knesset, and over half the population of Israel believe exactly the opposite – that it will save Jewish lives. Lastly, this law does not refer to elected representatives, for if Yitzhak Rabin was really a pursuer, then so are all his followers and that would mean that Amir should have killed over half the population of Israel! In other words, even according to the law of the pursuer, this act was totally futile and senseless since the peace process will continue.[6]

#### References[edit]

1. Sanhedrin 74a
2. Rambam, Hilchot Rotzei'ach 1:6,7
3. Yudelman, Michal (November 9, 1997). "Massive rally honors Rabin. Crowd estimated up to 200,000." Jerusalem Post. Archived from the original on August 18, 2000. Retrieved 21 August 2006.
4. Stern, Jessica. "Talking with Jewish Extremists". PBS. Retrieved 21 August 2006. Excerpted from *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, ISBN 0-06-050533-8.
5. "Oslo – Reflections on a decade of death". Christian Action for Israel. September–October 2003.
6. "Rabbinic response: Jewish Law on the Killing of Yitzhak Rabin", by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, The Shalom Center, 11/14/2005