

A Tribute to My Friend, President Shimon Peres

My beloved friend, President Shimon Peres, has died. It was my great pleasure to have known this man. He suffered a major medical emergency on Tuesday, September 13, an event from which, sadly, he did not recover.

President Peres was one of the founding fathers of the State of Israel, and one of the most beloved Israeli leaders worldwide. Born in Wiszniew, Poland (now Vishnyeva, Belarus) in 1923, his father moved to Palestine in 1932, settling in Tel Aviv. His family joined him in 1934. His achievements as an Israeli leader were historic, and his brilliance was matched only by his compassion.

President Peres served as prime minister of Israel following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, and was elected president in 2007. Following his retirement in 2014, he graciously and selflessly agreed to serve as International Chair of the Friends of Zion Heritage Center and Museum in Jerusalem of which I am the founder.

It was a rare privilege for me to travel with him when he presented the Friends of Zion (FOZ) award to a president, a prince and a pope. It was a delight to accompany this amazing man as he presented the awards to Prince Albert II of Monaco, and to President George W. Bush, and wife, Laura, at the Bush Presidential Library, and at a special meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican.

As he and I met with Pope Francis, the pontiff wrapped his hands around those of President Peres. I could see the feelings of admiration Pope Francis had for the president. The two men spoke of the morality of leadership in the world as the Pope was invited to be a Friend of Zion.

We had the same amazing experience with President George W. Bush at his presidential library in Dallas, Texas. After the presentation of the FOZ award, Mr. Bush looked at President Peres and said, "I'll bet you are older than my father." President Peres smiled and answered, "I am three years older." The two men enjoyed a very jovial chat as they walked through the library.

When I first met him and shared my dream to unite non-Jewish friends with the State of Israel—Friends of Zion—he said to me, "I will help you." President Peres said, "It takes more energy to make enemies than to make friends, and to sustain them." He generously reached out in love and compassion to serve our Friends of Zion Museum, standing with us and making friends for the nation of Israel, a part of his life's work. No one made more friends for his beloved homeland than did Shimon Peres. Most of us don't accomplish even a fraction of what he has accomplished.

Thanks to his amazing kindness, Friends of Zion Heritage Center, Museum and Global Initiative have now exceeded the eight-million-member mark during the first year of operation. In the many visits and meals shared with President Peres, I asked him repeatedly to please stop talking for a moment to give my brain a rest. It was my privilege to observe the genius of one of the most beautiful and brilliant minds ever created as he represented the nation of Israel. He had the capacity to take the most complicated problems and make them more easily understood.

President Peres was a kind and gentle soul, filled with amazing love. He refused to discriminate against anyone. I was often asked why, with his busy schedule, he would be so kind to the Friends of Zion Museum.

The only reason is that he liked everyone—even his enemies. He believed in the cause of friendship to his last breath. It has been my distinct honor to call him "friend."

Even though we had ideological differences, that which united us—our love for Israel—was so much greater. Words are insufficient to express my love for my treasured friend and giant of a man, Shimon Peres. {eoa}

Dr. Michael D. Evans is an award-winning journalist who has served as a confidant to multiple Prime Ministers of Israel and leaders in the Middle East for more than two decades. He has spoken in thousands of churches and appeared on hundreds of network television and radio shows, including Good Morning America, Crossfire, and Nightline, and multiple appearances on the 700 Club. He appears frequently on Fox News, CNN World News, NBC, ABC, and CBS, and his insightful articles and perspectives on Israel and the Middle East have appeared in The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Washington Times, Jerusalem Post, and newspapers worldwide.