

**In Honor of the 11th Yahrzeit:**

# *Kiddush And Kiddush Hashem In Space* **A Higher Perspective On Ilan Ramon**

**- Dov Levy**

Early on the morning of February 1, 2003 (29 Shvat, 5763), Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated, minutes before its scheduled landing. Among the seven crewmembers that lost their lives in the accident was Ilan Ramon, Israel's first astronaut.

Although he lived a secular life, he bought Jewish symbols with him on his flight. He also spoke publicly about his feelings as a representative of the Jewish people. Read about this extraordinary space flight—the first shuttle flight to offer kosher food—and the man who raised Jewish awareness to new heights.



The clock had just struck 9:00 that morning. Texans who looked into the sky witnessed a startling, unearthly spectacle. An object streaked through the sky at high speed, disintegrating and leaving streaks of blazing light as the pieces fell.

If someone thought a UFO had come to visit the United States, it would be hard to blame them. The informed, however, knew that Space Shuttle Columbia was speeding toward Cape Canaveral, Florida, for its scheduled landing at 9:16. For those in the know, the tragic sight was unmistakable.

Space Shuttle Columbia was lost.

Together with the \$4 billion spacecraft and its equipment worth millions of dollars more, the lives of its crew were lost as well. The seven astronauts chosen for this flight—designated STS-107—were a typically diverse group of Americans. They included

one African American and two women, one of whom was Indian-born. And one who was not even American.

Ilan Ramon was Israel's first astronaut. Although he lived a completely secular life, he bought Jewish symbols with him on his flight. He also spoke publicly about his feelings as a representative of the Jewish people. His sudden and tragic death shook up his countrymen.

## STS-107

The usual crowd was on hand to witness one of the mightiest manmade spectacles ever as it would be performed for the 113th time. It was early in the morning of January 16, 2003, at the John F. Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Space Shuttle Columbia, the oldest craft in NASA's space shuttle fleet, was preparing to lift off once again. The weather was perfect with not a cloud in the deep blue sky, allowing the launch to go ahead as scheduled.

The spectators consisted of family and friends of the seven crewmembers as well as various NASA officials. Of course there were also hundreds of technicians and other personnel watching the event on the ground, on their screens and on innumerable instrument panels.

In addition to the regulars on hand to witness the awesome scene there was also a high security presence, well beyond the usual for a space shuttle launching. Normal liftoffs do not involve foreign security personnel and certainly not a SWAT team. But this was not a regular launch. Columbia would be carrying Israel's first astronaut into space and officials did not want to have any problems with terrorists and enemies of Israel.

At 10:39 the massive rockets fired, generating a mind-boggling 7.8 million pounds of thrust. A thunderous roar announced liftoff as Columbia soared into the sky in a seemingly picture-perfect launch. In less than nine minutes the shuttle settled into orbit, speeding around Earth at 18,000 MPH with an altitude of 175 miles. Within



Space Shuttle Columbia is delivered to the launch site for its 28th and last flight.



Columbia lifting off on her final mission. The small, light-colored triangle visible at the base of the strut near the nose of the orbiter is the Left Bipod Foam Ramp.



An astronaut during a spacewalk.



Ilan Ramon participates in a mission training session.

hours, the seven crewmembers began 15 days of around-the-clock "microgravity experiments." Working in two shifts they performed some 80 scientific experiments prepared by a varied group of international researchers.

The crew of STS-107 was led by 45-year-old Commander Rick Husband, a US Air Force colonel who was on his second space flight. (In May 1999, Husband piloted the first space shuttle mission to dock with the International Space Station.) The pilot for the mission was 41-year-old US Navy commander William McCool. Serving as a mission specialist was 46-year-old US Navy Captain Dr. David Brown, who was both a physician and an outstanding aviator. The other mission specialists on the flight were 41-year-old Indian-born Dr. Kalpana Chawla, a woman on her second space flight; 43-year-old US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Michael Anderson, an African American who was also on his second space flight; and 41-year-old US Navy Captain Dr. Laurel Clark.

The crew was rounded out by 48-year-old Israeli Air Force Colonel Ilan Ramon. Ramon was originally cast as a "payload specialist," meaning he would be in charge of only a narrow section of the cargo of experiments. The sheer breadth of the workload that fell on the rest of the crewmembers quickly

changed that to a regular mission specialist, however.

In the words of Payload Commander Mike Anderson, "When we were assigned to the flight, I started looking at the payloads and it became obvious Ilan would have to be fully integrated with the crew. Usually a payload specialist specializes in one payload, but we couldn't afford that luxury on this flight. So Ilan is fully trained in all the payloads. He's going to do everything that the other astronauts on the flight are doing."



Commander Rick Husband (left) with Ilan Ramon in the cockpit of the Space Shuttle Columbia.