

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

The Faces of War

The Yom Kippur War was marked by men in kittel'ach and sneakers racing through the streets of Jerusalem in response to the call-up. . . . Jews of every allegiance and conviction suddenly realizing that we are one. . . . Words from prayers, the Prophets and chapters of Psalms that were so often recited in haste, without hardly a second thought—and sometimes without a first—now revealing precise, urgent meanings to their readers. . . . Yeshivos humming with Torah and tefillah round the clock, even during the customary Succos intersession. . . . Monies reserved for “necessities” became expendable for the one true necessity: Survival, with Jews everywhere giving more than they had ever thought they could.

Every war has its own character, its own heart and soul. By reviewing the face of events, we can often see deeper and understand more.

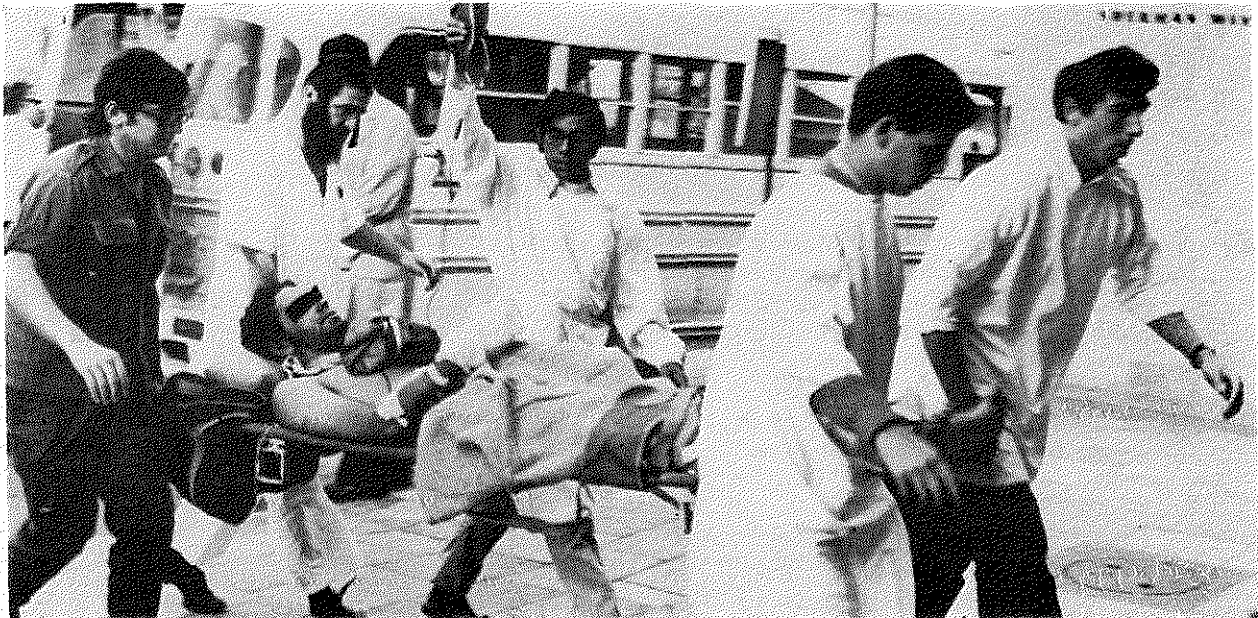
Jerusalem, October 17.

THE OLD WOMAN makes her way slowly up Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda Street, sobbing uncontrollably. “He volunteered,” she is heard to mumble as she weeps. “He volunteered!”*

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The Reality Is Brought Home

AS A JEWESS from the Diaspora, now living in Israel, I am struck for the first time by the personal and individual face of war. During the Six Day War, comfortably ensconced in the United States, I feared for my people in Israel and prayed for the victory of the



Israeli Defense Forces. During this latest struggle, I have learned who the IDF is. As Mr. Begin put it during a recent Knesset debate: "We are told that *Zahal* (Israel Defense Forces) stopped the enemy's advance. But who is *Zahal*? They are our children."

The reality of this simple statement has been brought home to me in recent weeks: my landlord, my neighbor's husband, my doctor and dentist, my boss and his son—have all been mobilized. Every hour on the hour, clusters of those of us at home gather around the nearest transistor radio to hear the latest news from the front. There is discussion of the cease-fire. Does it mean that my friend can cease worrying about David who is on the western bank of the Canal?

Esther is happy today. Her husband phoned from Sinai this morning, so she knows that all is well.

The cafeteria owner's wife is nervous and preoccupied, unlike her usual cheerful self. She hasn't heard from her son in five days and doesn't even know where he is stationed.

Leah comes in to show me the woolen cap she is knitting for a soldier in the Golan. It gets very cold there at night, I am told.

Vivian drops by to ask a question and I see a piece of gauze bandaging her arm. She has given blood this morning.

The beverage stand next to the post office is closed. The owner's military post box number is displayed in the window.

A sign in a cafe window asks for help—a boy is needed to wash dishes. I remember: the owner's son was in uniform the last time he served me.

"Take out your Voluntary War Loan here," reads the notice on the bank door. People have and continue to do so, despite financial hardship.

The phone begins to ring. *Did I hear about 's son 's cousin 's brother-in-law?* I ask Yael if he has heard about Zelda's son.

"Yes," he says. "I have heard about many sons." He does not know if he has the courage to face their family, now sitting *shiva*.

P. VAN GELDER*

In a Hospital

DURING A VISIT to a hospital, the Chief Chaplain to the Defense Forces, Rabbi Brigadier Mordechai Piron stopped at the bedside of a tank gunner, badly burned and still in pain. The gunner bearded and wearing peyos, a boy from Bne Brak, whispered to the Rabbi: "Please, Rabbi, tell me a *D'var Torah*." The Rabbi gave a discourse on the subject of *Milchemes Mitzvah*, and the wounded soldier listened with rapt attention.*

West of Suez: "Am Kedoshim"

IT IS TWO WEEKS since the cease-fire has gone into effect, but peace is still far off. Israeli soldiers on the

western side of the Suez Canal do not put away their guns, neither by day nor by night.

Suddenly a different melody strikes the ear—an old, well-known one. The eye searches the landscape and spots a group of soldiers sprawled out on the sands, scorched by the hot African sun, with *Gemoras Kesubos* in their hands. Yeshiva men learning aloud, while their Uzzi sub-machine guns are lying within reach. The circle grows. Not all have *Gemoras*, not all learn; they listen to the voice, and they listen to the old, well-known *Gemora* melody.

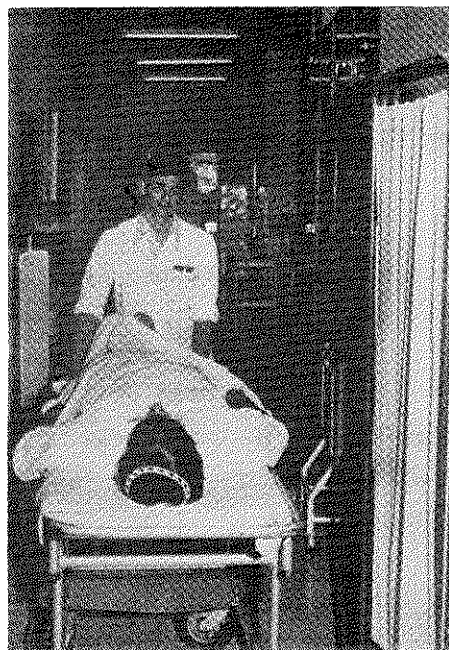
On the side stands a Commander who only recently, together with these soldiers, broke the Egyptian front. He mumbles to himself "*Shal ne'alecha*—remove thy shoes for these are an *Am Kedoshim*, a nation of sacred people."

In Tel Aviv: Am Kedoshim.

FROM THE FRONT TO A HOSPITAL IN TEL AVIV: A doctor tells me, "I do not have time to sort out my thoughts of the days I spent here in the hospital with the wounded soldiers, of the high morale that unfolded before my eyes. . . . I cannot forget the picture of a soldier who bit his lips in pain when I fixed him up. There was not time for anesthesia, so I could not reduce his pain. He looked up to me and pleaded: *Don't call my mother, don't let her see me in this situation. . . .*

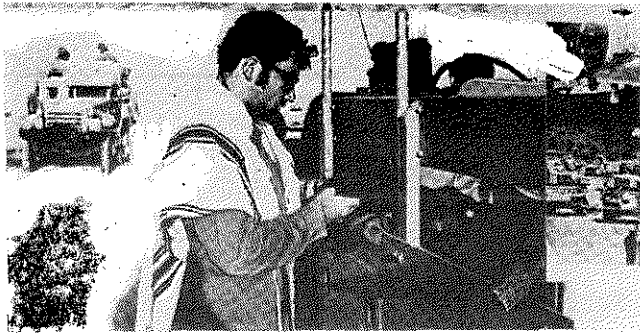
"And another patient—he was on the operating table, and he told me: *Doctor, today is Shabbos. My parents are religious. Wait until tonight with the telephone call to my parents. Why should they have a disturbed Shabbos?*"

And the doctor also murmurs to himself: "*Am Kedoshim . . . a sacred people.*"



The Jewish Observer / November, 1973

* Reprinted from THE JEWISH TRIBUNE, London, England.



— And in Suez City

ON THE OTHER SIDE of the Suez Canal in the city of Suez, one spots a group of youngsters in uniform. Are they merely children in Purim disguise?

A group of soldiers surrounding an elderly bearded Jew, an army chaplain; he speaks to them and then helps them don *tefillin*. No, they are not religious boys. Possibly once before, when *Bar-Mitzvah*, did they put on *tefillin*. Now they are besieging the chaplain and swear that from here on, they will don *tefillin* daily.

The Rabbi says to them: "When you return home, make certain to recite the *Birkas Hagomel* in *shul*." But these boys do not want to wait, and all of a sudden you get carried away when one of them, literally a child, exclaims: "There is no time. We must do it now. All the Jews throughout the land must say *Birkas Hagomel* today. The entire nation must bench *goimel*—thanking G-d for having delivered us from death."

DAVID FLINKER
In "Der Allgemeine Journal"
November 13, 1973

"On the Eve of . . . a Test"

Dear Folks עמנו, Jerusalem

Remember how I wrote you that Friday here at the Yeshiva is vacation, like an *erev Yom Tov* (holiday eve)? You know, after a Thursday *mishmor* when we're up all night, and we prepare for Shabbos.—Well, forget it. Since the war broke out—and after it stopped, too—you walk in the *bais medrash* right up to *Mincha* on Friday, and the place is packed tight, humming with Torah. Like just before a *bechina* (test), or during . . . from a letter from an American in Jerusalem

"*Nichum Aveilim*"—A Condolence Call

RABBI YAAKOV MIZRACHI who represents *Agudath Israel* in the *Knesset*, lost his son David in the opening days of the war. HORAV SHRAGA GROSSBARD, director general of *Chinuch Atzmai*, told of his condolence visit to the Mizrachi family, at the recent *Agudath Israel Convention*:

UPON ENTERING, I was struck by the tableau of the men wrapped in their *taleisim*, sitting in the heat and flickering light of the many candles.

—Then, by Rabbi Mizrachi's greeting: "I truly have cause to rejoice!"

Rejoice? I thought that my friend was incoherent from the shock of losing his son in a burning tank.

"Yes," he repeated, "I should rejoice. Who, today can offer a *olah temimah*—a pure and sacred burnt offering to Hashem? A *korban* requires four days of *bikur*—examination against defects before it can be offered. Which of us can be so pure in our thoughts over so long a period of time? Four days . . . the first day was *Erev Yom Kippur* when each man is involved in his personal *teshuvah* . . . the second was *Yom Kippur*, when forces of evil are powerless and men are free of petty thoughts and impulses . . . on the third day, David was called up, and he had no time for anything but preparation to go . . . and on the fourth day, who pauses from the thick of battle to entertain thoughts of evil?—So my son passed through his four days of examination without flaw before he was consumed on the altar.—Shouldn't I rejoice?"

Later, my wife told to me of the mourning women of the Mizrachi family. The martyred boy's grandmother was weeping uncontrollably. Mrs. Mizrachi turned to her mother and softly reprimanded her: "We have no cause to mourn, Mother. We were given a keepsake—a pure, untainted soul. And now we have returned this soul to its Maker, still pure and untainted. When can one ever claim such a rare achievement?"

"When The Last Moment Is Upon Us"

IN A SHUL IN ZICHRON MOSHE (Rabbi Grossbard reported) a young man, after being called up to the Torah benched *gomel*—the blessing to G-d for having survived a life-threatening situation. I asked him what had occurred. He began his reply in matter-of-fact tones, but he quickly choked with emotion:

"The other three who were with me in the tank were not religious, so I was alone in my *Tehillim* saying. Then a shell struck the hatch, and, in effect, sealed us inside. The tank started to burn, and we realized that there was no escape.

"The others eyed me anxiously and one of them broke out with a plea, 'You're a *dati*. You know what to do. What does one say at the last minute?'

"I told them *Shma Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echod*. Together we screamed: *Shma Yisroel* . . . Then, miraculously—could it be anything but a miracle?—another shell hit the spot where the first one had landed. The hatch blew open and we all scrambled to safety. . . . So now I benched *goimel*."

It struck me that perhaps that was all that G-d had wanted from them: to realize that they were at His mercy. Knowing this, and expressing it in *Shma*, is enough. Then the trap can be sprung, their fate unsealed.

Now, it seems, the last moments are indeed approaching. It is time that we recognize it and join voice, shouting together *Shma Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echod!* □