

## Yizkor: Remembering the Yom Kippur War Rabbi Aaron Finkelstein

Tel Aviv is a notoriously quiet city on Yom Kippur, with trucks and public transit usually giving way to bicycles and pedestrians. Many people know this day, the tenth of Tishrei as "Yom Ofanaim," the day of bicycles. Fifty years ago however, the quiet of Yom Kippur was interrupted, a chilling harbinger of the war to come.

Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, who later became the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, describes the slow realization that washed over him and the rest of Israel as the Yom Kippur war broke out. Here is how he remembers that Yom Kippur (Out of the Depths, pages 248-249):

*On Yom Kippur...the 930 synagogue seats were usually completely filled. But that year on the morning of Yom Kippur, which fell on Shabbat, I noticed a few empty seats. Although this aroused my curiosity, I did not spend too much time wondering about it. The next ominous sign, however, was the sound of car engines on that late morning...*

*Finally in the afternoon, the usual quiet of the holiest day of the year was broken by the sound of streams of men in army uniforms entering the synagogue, carrying lists.*

Until this year, I had never thought about where exactly they were in the Yom Kippur davening. In all likelihood they had just heard or were moments from uttering the hallowed words of *Unetaneh Tokef*, which we will recite in Musaf, shortly:

וְנִתְּנָה תְּקוּף קִדְשָׁת הַיּוֹם. כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאִיּוֹם...

"Let us describe the great holiness of this day, for it is awesome and frightening."

This prayer describes the heavenly court that convenes on the Yamim Noraim. During the Yom Kippur of 1973 however, the prayers' words were coming to life in real time, in synagogues throughout Israel:

וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֵה...

"And You inscribe, seal, record and count..."

וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע. וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה יִדְקֶה יִשְׁמַע.

A great shofar is sounded and a silent, gentle voice is heard...

That year on Yom Kippur, Untenah Tokef was reversed! First came the quiet and small voices, calling people up.

*They approached congregants, one by one, clapped them on their shoulders, and whispered something in their ears. The words, “emergency call-up order” began to float through the room, intermingling with words of the liturgy.*

*It was obvious that something unusual was going on. That afternoon, the synagogue was almost emptied of young men...*

Then came the great shofar, a siren:

*At exactly ten to two that afternoon, the wail of a siren shattered the silence, shocking the congregants. Someone announced that the radio was broadcasting call-up codes to the various reserve units. In a split second, the entire atmosphere was transformed. First, the army called up its logistics personnel: drivers, cooks, communications experts, and medics. Many members of combat units remained in their seats in the synagogue and continued their prayers. The night after Yom Kippur, though, a complete blackout went into effect, wrapping Tel Aviv, like the rest of Israel, in darkness.*

2659 *chayalim*, Israeli soldiers were lost in the war that followed, a cataclysmic toll, especially for the young and small country.

To prepare for Yizkor, let us look back at the Yom Kippur War. The Midrash Tanhuma, contains one of the earliest illusions to Yizkor and notes that

הַחַיִּים פּוֹדִין אֶת הַמֵּתִים. לָכֵן אָנוּ נוֹהֲגִין לְהַזְכִּיר אֶת הַמֵּתִים בְּיוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים וְלִפְסֹק עֲלֵיהֶם צִדְקָה.

“The living redeem the deceased...therefore, it is our tradition to mention the deceased on Yom Kippur and pledge charity on their behalf...which will raise them up just as an arrow ascends from a bow” (Tanhuma Chadash, Haazinu, 6:1).”]

This morning I want to tell two stories of people who fought and died in the war. Let us raise them up, “as an arrow ascends from a bow.” One of them was an Israeli, the lone son of elderly Holocaust survivors from B’nei Brak. The other was also a son of Holocaust refugees, a son of Chicago and even a member of Anshe Sholom.

Let me start by thanking David Passman, our unofficial shul historian. David not only teaches history but embodies what it is to be a student of history, understanding its meaning and import and sharing it with others. The story of Max Marom is no exception, which he recently sent to the shul, excerpts of which I am honored to share today.

Max Marom was born Max Manning on the island of Java early in World War II. Though his earliest years were spent in a red-cross orphanage, he miraculously reunited with his parents after his mother recognized her own, a sturdy, self-assured three-year-old. They then joined her sister in Chicago, and they joined Anshe Sholom.

Max was, in David's words, *"A strong, smart, witty kid, and fearless. The kind who walked on fences."* While others went to conventional colleges and universities, Max went to the Air Force Academy...

*In early June 1967 Max left the U.S. air base in Ethiopia where he was then stationed, flew into Jordan, and crossed through the Mandelbaum Gate westbound to visit relatives in Haifa.*

*The Israelis did not want any uniformed Americans in the country when the six-day war broke out in 1967, but before they ushered him out, they reached agreement that, when he completed his obligation to the United States Air Force, he would enter the Israeli Air Force at the same rank. Thus in 1969 he became Israel's Captain Manning, later Captain Marom, and then came a promotion to Major. David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir knew him as "the American".*

*During the Yom Kippur War, fifty Octobers ago, Max's daughter was born and they named her Dina, from "Yom ha-Din". Max got a few hours' leave, so she has a tiny photograph of herself in her father's arms.*

*Max was the pilot on a rescue mission near the Suez Canal when an Egyptian soldier heard the engine noise overhead through the swirling sands and fired at it....*

*A few days later, as David remembers it, he phoned Max's mother, and after an awful pause she said, "He's missing." It was spring before they found his body. He lies interred in a military cemetery near Beersheva. Air Force Major Max Marom. Mikhael ben Ze'ev.*

Max's Israeli name - Marom - means "from above", elevated or lofty, a fitting name for a pilot. There is also a striking allusion between this name and a key line in Unetaneh Tokef, which I mentioned earlier. After the great Shofar sounds, we read:

וְכָל בְּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבְרוּ לְפָנֶיךָ כְּבָנֵי מָרוֹן

“and all creatures shall parade before you *kivnei maron*.” Our machzor offers one translation of this line: that *bnei maron* means a herd of sheep, and God is the shepherd counting each one of us as we pass by.

However the Gemara in Rosh Hashana (18a) offers two other translations:

מאי כבני מרון? ... ריש לקיש אמר: כמעלות בית מרון. (אמר) רב יהודה אמר שמואל: כחיילות של בית דוד.

What is *kivnei maron*? Reish Lakish said, “Like the steps leading up to *beit maron*.” *Maron* was the name of a high up place. In this interpretation, on Yom Kippur, God counts each one of us as we ascend up a peak.

Alternatively, Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, “Like the army of David. Rabba Bar Bar Channa said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, “And everyone is acknowledged with a single glance.”

Rav Yehudah's interpretation suggests that during this time we are all like soldiers in David's army, just like Max Marom. Like soldiers, we wear a uniform of sorts; we are all dressed in white. We stand together, like a battalion of soldiers in this moment as God inspects and acknowledges each one of us.

Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, whom I referenced earlier, tells the story of another soldier, in his incredible memoir Out of the Depths, which describes Rabbi Lau's own miraculous survival of Buchenwald as an 8 year old and subsequent life, and illustrious career as a rabbi in Israel.

A year after the war in 1974, Rabbi Lau was asked to speak on Israel Television about Yom Kippur, fasting and the recent war. (*Note: The following passages from Out of the Depths are condensed and paraphrased at certain points for the purposes of clarity and brevity*)

The TV station had collected materials from soldiers and families. *I sifted through a large pile of postcards, but what attracted my attention was a piece of thick, rough brown paper, like the kind used for packaging large sacks of flour and rice sold in local grocery stores. I pulled it out of the pile...and that note on it touched me so that I still remember it by heart.*

*The writer was the son of Holocaust survivor, living in Bnei Brak...Their only son attended religious elementary school...was active in Bnei Akiva...[and was eventually sent] to a training course for paratroop officers. On his base, he met a young woman soldier from Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz. The disparity between the young man wearing a knit kippah under his red beret and the woman from fervently secular kibbutz created tension. They argued endlessly, on everything from the Holocaust and Divine Providence to religion and nationality, religion and state, and Jewish values and socialism.*

*One day, the woman soldier entered the paratrooper's office carrying a kit bag on her back. She had come to say goodbye...and admitted...her feelings for him went far beyond their arguments over religion.*

*...He explained that it would be better to end their relationship right then and there...he explained that they could not create a life together because their backgrounds were so different. "We eat different foods, and your Shabbat experience is totally unlike mine. A chasm we can never bridge separates your parents on the kibbutz and my parents from Bnei Brak. They would be gravely hurt if I pursued the relationship...they parted.*

*A few weeks later, the woman came back to the base, in civilian dress and explained that she had started exploring Judaism slowly. She hadn't quite been the same since returning to the kibbutz. She had left her father's house, she said, just as Avraham had done...*

*She moved to Bnei Brak to learn about Judaism for herself. "If I decide it's for me, and you decide I'm for you, perhaps we can build a future together. If not, no big deal. I'll learn about Judaism and then go home."*

*After a year, they married and lived near the officer's parents. They had two sons. When the younger son was two weeks old, the Yom Kippur War began.*

*During services, many of his friends were called up to reserve duty, but he did not receive an order. After the fast, he went home, recited Havdallah and phoned his unit... His wife prepared him a bundle of provisions, including a brown paper bag of cookies. After midnight, a jeep stopped in front of the house. His unit had come to pick him up. He kissed his two sons, got into the jeep and never came back.*

*Among the personal possessions sent to his wife after he died was the brown paper package, on which he had hastily written, "My dear, it's either me or this note - only one of us will reach you. If I come home, which is not my present feeling, you'll never see*

*this note. But if the note gets to you, it means I'll never come back. You will be free to begin a new chapter in your life.*

*This is the time to thank you for the long journey you made for me...I know how difficult that journey was. I never expressed the appreciation you so deserve. As I said, you don't owe me anything, but I have one request to make of you: educate the sons God gave us in the same way my parents educated me. Yours...*

Rabbi Lau concludes the story with a reflection.

*[This story] is a personal example of an ordinary man who throughout his life followed his spiritual compass and conscience. The uniqueness of this note is that it shows what occupied the mind of a combat soldier in the last moments of his life: the religious education of his children...he thought of himself as a bridge between generations. At first, he acted out of consideration for his parents; at the end of his life, he thought of his children's future.*

Whether we say yizkor or not, we are each a bridge between the generations. Thus, it is upon us to act in consideration of those that came before us and those that might come after. Fundamentally, Yizkor is about remembering those that have passed, who they were and what they stood for. But Yizkor also contains a commitment to act - to give tzedakah in memory of our loved ones.

Yizkor then asks of us a question: How might we act to bring merit to those who have passed? How might we act to honor those who fell in יום כיפור, the Yom Kippur War?

When we are able to answer this question, we redeem those that came before us, moving our world closer to the ultimate redemption.

Gmar Chatima Tova.

