

# A Day to Remember

## Rabbi Reuven Mann

This coming Yom Kippur will mark the 50th anniversary of the sneak attack launched on that day by Egypt and Syria against Israel. Who among us does not remember the moment when the unforeseen news reached our ears in the Synagogues of America? In spite of many indications that an attack was imminent, Israel was reluctant to take the possibility of war seriously and did not seize the initiative. The Arabs were thus allowed to deliver the first blow and wreak havoc with the Israelis in the opening phase of this confrontation. What caused Israel to be flippant to the point of recklessness in its handling of this matter?

In general, the experience of “success” is a greater character “test” than that of failure. When one sustains a serious setback in any area of life, it is a shock that tends to make him humble and introspective. He searches for his mistakes and can come to discover the spiritual flaws which led to his upending. He may then set out on a new path based on honesty, humbleness, commitment to hard work and go on from there to achieve great things.

However, the attainment of great victories often goes to one’s head and produces a sense of superiority and disdain for others that can have terrible consequences. This can be seen in Israel’s ongoing war with its Arab neighbors. The Six Day War was an overwhelming success for Israel as it ran roughshod over the Arabs in every theater of battle and emerged with the West Bank, the entire Sinai and substantial territory on the Golan Heights. The great victory produced a feeling of euphoria, which engendered an attitude of invincibility and contempt for the enemy who confronted them.

In large part, the Israeli sense of superiority influenced how it viewed all of the signs that the Arabs were preparing for a new confrontation. Israeli planners were convinced that no attack was forthcoming because the Arabs certainly knew that they were no match for the Israelis and would therefore stay put. This colossal distortion of reality led to the deaths and crippling of many soldiers who paid the price of this faulty thinking.

However, while the Yom Kippur War began as a terrible debacle for Israel, things soon began to change. The Egyptians and Syrians (with help from their Russian mentors) had learned the lessons of their defeat in the Six Day War. The Israeli tanks had been lethal in large part because of the devastating supporting power of the Israeli Air Force. The Arab’s Soviet sponsors put at their disposal their newest anti-aircraft missiles which unleashed devastation on Israel’s Phantom warplanes which were the bulwark of the Israeli air arm.

At the same time, Egyptian infantrymen were equipped with new anti-tank missiles (Saggers) which enabled individual soldiers to attack and destroy Israeli tanks. Without their air support and with their tanks now vulnerable to a deadly missile threat, Israel experienced significant losses and its aura of invincibility was shattered. Something dramatic needed to happen.

It came in the form of one of the most daring initiatives in military history. The Israeli forces fought their way in bitter battles to the edge of the Suez Canal. They then crossed to the Western (Egyptian) side of the waterway and commenced the battles which would secure their victory. Operating in armored formations on the Egyptian home turf, they were able to capture or destroy the missile bases which had unleashed so much damage. With the Egyptian missile cover removed, the IAF was free to launch their devastating attacks on the Egyptian ground forces.

At the same time, the crossing enabled the Israelis to sweep across the Western canal side to surround and cut off the Egyptian Third Army, which was established on the Eastern (Israeli) side. The Third Army, consisting of about thirty thousand troops, were now isolated and dependent on Israel for basic sustenance, including water. Israel could wipe them out or wait for their surrender. The war which had begun with unanticipated Arab victories was now headed toward an Israel triumph of greater proportion than the Six Day War.

But that was not to be, as America decided that the moment its diplomacy had been waiting for had arrived. The U.S. was a friend of Israel and its major supplier of advanced military equipment. It supported Israel in the war, as an Egyptian win would constitute an unacceptable victory for the Soviet Union, which was America's adversary in the Cold War. However, the U.S. under the Nixon-Kissinger regime did not desire too great an Israeli victory, as this would spell the end of Anwar Sadat (President of Egypt) and any chance of peace between the warring parties.

The United States wanted to usurp Russia, become the leading Superpower in the Middle East and, in effect, take Egypt and Israel under its wings. To achieve this, the U.S. had to demonstrate that it alone was able to save Egypt's Third Army from Israel's mighty grip. Therefore, Kissinger informed Israel, unequivocally, that it would have to allow U.N. convoys through their lines to bring food and water to the beleaguered Egyptian troops. The U.S. could now emerge in the eyes of the Arab world as the one who enabled Sadat to save face and restore Arab pride as well as its land.

This was galling to the Israeli soldiers and commanders who had paid a very high price to stave off a criminal Arab aggression and now stood ready to deliver the *coup de grâce* to the stranded Third Army. Israel certainly deserved to bring this war to a close in a decisive fashion, which would teach the Arabs a lesson they wouldn't soon forget. But Israel was not in the driver's seat.

As we commemorate the Yom Kippur War, we must study its teachings and learn its lessons. To be sure, there are lessons for the military and political leaders, who made serious mistakes and placed the nation in grave danger, but the rest of us can also glean insights from this piece of history. While we strive for success in all our endeavors, we must seek to avoid the egotistical excesses that come with euphoric exuberance.

We can take a lesson from the Jewish farmer who brings his first fruits to the *Kohen* in the Holy Temple and declares his gratitude to Hashem for all the blessings with which he has been endowed. Recognition of Hashem's bountifulness protects us from the sin of hubris and the foolish behaviors that generates. This certainly was the main cause of the mistakes which dominated the early phase of the fighting and placed Israel in such a tenuous position.

But grim as things appeared, at no point did Israel lose heart and despair of victory. It demonstrated great resiliency as it innovated a bold and daring strategy which caught the enemy by surprise and turned the tide of the war. As the Rabbis say, “Even when the sharp sword is on one’s neck, he should not despair of (Divine) mercy. (Berachot 10a)” Israel did not yield to depression and snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. But what about America’s intervention to prevent the full blossoming of the looming victory? What about her insistence, much to the chagrin of the brave Jewish fighters, that the Third Army must not be destroyed?

It seems to me that history has vindicated the American diplomacy. As a result of U.S. efforts, Sadat was able to claim a victory, and this solidified his position as an Arab hero. He then extricated his country from the grip of Russian control and established a new relationship with the U.S.

Sadat must be given credit for undertaking the peace initiative in his landmark visit to Jerusalem and Knesset speech, which triggered the peace process that led to the Camp David accords in which peace and diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel were established. Sadat reoriented his nation from hostility to non-belligerency in its policy toward Israel. But all this was only possible because Egypt, with the help of the U.S. was permitted to retain its dignity and pride. Had the Third Army been decimated or forced to surrender, none of this would have happened and the state of war would have persisted.

As we commemorate the Yom Kippur War, let us renew our gratitude to Hashem for the goodly land He has given us and for the dedicated young men and women who put their lives on the line to defend it. May Hashem strengthen and protect the brave *Chayalim* and *Chayalot* of the IDF and enable them to return home safely and in good spirits. “May Hashem give strength to His nation; May Hashem bless His nation with peace. (Tehilim 29:11)”

G’mar Chatima Tova.

Dear Friends,

My newest book, *Eternally Yours: Torah’s Enduring Relevance for a Life of Wisdom on Devarim* was recently published, and is now available at: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0C9S3G1H2/>

I hope that my essays will enhance your reading and study of the Book of Devarim and would greatly appreciate a brief review on Amazon.com.

Additionally, for those in *Eretz Yisrael*, my books are available at David Linden’s bookstore located at Emek Refaim Street 21, Jerusalem and at Pomeranz Book store, Be’eri 5 Jerusalem. They are very nice stores to visit and browse.

—Rabbi Reuven Mann