40 YEARS AGO...
REMEMBERING THE YOM KIPPUR WAR
40 Years Ago...

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

I was in my last year of school in South Africa when the Yom Kippur War broke out. During those fateful days for the Jewish people, my experiences were very personal. My brother, Tzvi, who was a soldier in Tzahal (The Israel Defence Forces) at the time, served in a tank on the Golan Heights in the midst of very fierce battles.

It was a particularly worrying time for us, a Diaspora family disconnected geographically from the centre of action. Of course, this was coupled with our overall deep concern amidst a direct threat to the very existence of the State of Israel.

In January 1974, I came to Israel to study at Yeshivat Kerem BeYavneh, near Ashdod in central Israel (the South African school year concludes in December).

Tragically, a number of the Yeshiva students had been killed in combat during the war while another student, Binyamin Mazuz, was being held as a prisoner of war in Damascus. My first year in Yeshiva was thus filled with ongoing tension about his fate. The Beit Midrash (study hall) resounded with our fervent prayers for his wellbeing and I will never forget our celebrations when he returned safely back home after a prolonged, harrowing ordeal.

My most memorable moment from the war was of a soldier standing on his tank during Chol HaMoed Succot (middle days of Succot), wrapped in a tallit, waving a lulav, etrog and the other species. The combination of prayers to God, coupled with selfless, courageous action, which could lead to paying the ultimate sacrifice, stood out for me as a powerful example of how we should face the challenges of such troubled times.

The contemporary lack of awareness in some quarters about the Yom Kippur War, a key event in our modern history, gives cause for concern. As a community we must deepen our awareness of these events and the many other significant historic turning points that continue to influence the character of Israeli society and the entire Jewish world.

I therefore enthusiastically commend the US Living & Learning department for producing this booklet, through which many of us will share poignant memories, whilst others will be informed for the first time about the epic events that unfolded exactly 40 years ago on Yom Kippur.
Israel launches counter-attack

From YORAM KESSEL—Jerusalem

Strong Israeli forces were preparing on Tuesday to launch decisive blows against the Egyptians who had crossed the Suez Canal and the Syrians who had already begun forcing back the lines on the Galaf Heights in existence before the war started on Yom Kippur. The Israelis have been receiving supply and ammunition from the United States, China, and the Arabs on the other, about a ceasefire.

The Security Council met briefly on Monday night to discuss the new demand for hostilities in the Suez Canal and the Galaf Heights. The meeting was called to order on the request of the US, the United Nations, and the Soviet Union, and the Arab states on the other, about a ceasefire.

The Soviet Union and Egypt, the United Arab Republics, have demanded that the Israeli forces withdraw from the area. The Security Council met briefly on Monday night to discuss the new demand for hostilities in the Suez Canal and the Galaf Heights. The meeting was called to order on the request of the US, the United Nations, and the Soviet Union, and the Arab states on the other, about a ceasefire.

UN allows fighting to continue as Egypt rejects truce

From RICHARD YAFFE—United Nations

Mr. Alfa El-Bacha, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, immediately rejected the Egyptian offer to negotiate a ceasefire, and said that the only way to stop the fighting was for the United Nations to impose a ceasefire unilaterally. The Security Council met briefly on Monday night to discuss the new demand for hostilities in the Suez Canal and the Galaf Heights. The meeting was called to order on the request of the US, the United Nations, and the Soviet Union, and the Arab states on the other, about a ceasefire.

Nixon call to Brezhnev

From our Correspondent: Washington

Before Monday night's Security Council meeting, the White House disclosed that President Nixon had been in touch with the Soviet leader, Mr. Leonid Brezhnev, about the situation in the Middle East. Mr. Brezhnev is expected to arrive in Washington on Tuesday. The White House was prepared to discuss a quarrel between the two countries over the despatch of Soviet troops to the Middle East.

The US is prepared to discuss a quarrel between the two countries over the despatch of Soviet troops to the Middle East.

British press rebuffs Arab demand

The British foreign minister, Mr. Denis Healey, said on Tuesday that Britain would not be deflected by the Arab demand for a ceasefire. He said that Britain was prepared to discuss a quarrel between the two countries over the despatch of Soviet troops to the Middle East.

The War on Other Pages

General Herzog's analysis of the fighting

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Message from HE Daniel Taub, Ambassador of Israel to the Court of St James’s

Remembering Yom Kippur 1973

My memories of the Yom Kippur War are intertwined with memories of the United Synagogue. It was while spending the day in the Norrice Lea youth service that rumours began to filter in that Israel had been attacked by its neighbours. Never had words of the Yom Kippur machzor seemed more relevant: "On this day it is determined for countries: which for war and which for peace".

Over the next 15 days we were glued to the radio, urgently following on maps the progress of the Egyptian and Syrian forces until the Israeli counter-offensive and the end of the hostilities. As a youngster the war carried two profound messages for me: the first, how much we as a community were connected with the fate of our brothers in the Middle East, and the second, how Israel, even with the 1967 myth of invincibility punctured, could not permit itself to lose a single war.

But it was only after moving to Israel that I realised the extent to which this war had impacted on all levels of Israeli society. More than 2,600 soldiers who were killed and the many thousands of wounded, as well as the thousands of widows and orphaned children, had left a permanent scar. The confidence of the military and intelligence establishment was shattered as it struggled to confront the failure of what was called the 'konceptzia', its rigid and misguided analysis.

Many painful lessons were drawn from the 1973 war and led to changes in the army, in intelligence and other areas that are with us still forty years later.

But the main legacy of this war is the memory of the fallen. One community that suffered tremendously was that of Kibbutz Beit Hashita, which lost 11 members in battle. The Israeli composer Yair Rosenblum, who lived for several years in the kibbutz, composed a special melody in their memory for the Unetaneh Tokef prayer, combining Ashkenazi and Sephardi motifs. First performed in the Kibbutz, in recent years, it has been adopted by synagogues across Israel, a haunting memorial to the fallen on this holiest of days.

Daniel Taub
Ambassador of Israel to the Court of St James’s
Introduction

Rabbi Andrew Shaw
Director, US Living & Learning; Community Development Rabbi, Stanmore and Canons Park United Synagogue

Forty years ago today, Jews in our communities and around the world ushered in Yom Kippur as we do every year, unaware that only several hours later, the State of Israel would be under deadly attack on this holiest day.

Never were our Yom Kippur prayers for life or a Kol Nidre appeal for Israel more immediately relevant. Our communities, as well as those elsewhere, galvanised themselves in support of Israel, praying, donating, giving blood and going to Israel to actively support and fight for the beleaguered state.

Whilst some readers of this booklet may recall those heart-stopping times, when the very existence of the State was in the balance, others did not experience that Yom Kippur and its aftermath.

To mark the 40th anniversary of that momentous time, the US Living & Learning department has produced this booklet. It pays tribute to those who defended the State of Israel, honours the memory of the more than 2,600 soldiers who fell in the Yom Kippur War and also serves to pass on the messages and memories of that war – particularly the importance of striving for a secure and lasting peace - to people who did not experience it.

Today, we can travel or move to Israel with an ease which our ancestors throughout hundreds of years of the Diaspora may have considered Messianic. This is worthy of our thanks to God every day.

We must however never take the State of Israel ‘for granted’. As a proudly Zionist organisation supporting the State of Israel, we hope that this booklet will also provide some useful perspectives about the significance of the State as well as being spiritually uplifting for this Yom Kippur and beyond.

May you, all of the Jewish people and the State of Israel have an uplifting and safe Yom Kippur, blessed with a wonderful year ahead.
Acknowledgements

We are grateful to our contributors and are especially delighted to include an introduction from Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis. We thank Ambassador Daniel Taub and Rebbetzin Judy Fine for sharing their personal memories of Yom Kippur in 1973, which particularly speak to British readers. We are especially appreciative to Yehuda Porat for sharing his experiences as a combat soldier in 1973 and subsequent reflections.

Matthew Miller of Koren Publishers in Jerusalem kindly provided us with a text of The Memorial Prayer from the *Koren Minhag Anglia Yom Kippur Machzor* (prayer book), published together with the United Synagogue. May this help us to pray for God’s continuing care for those who fell in the Yom Kippur War, as well as for those who fell both in pre-State days and since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. *Yehi zichram baruch*, may their memory be for a blessing.

We thank Michael Fischberger of Gefen Publishing House in Jerusalem, for allowing us to reproduce extracts about Morris Katz, of blessed memory, from the moving work *A Voice Called: Stories of Jewish Heroism*.

Our thanks also go to Tracy Abraham of *The Jewish Chronicle* for allowing us to reproduce its front page of 12 October 1973, its first edition after Yom Kippur of that year.

We are particularly grateful to Dr Cornel Fleming, of Highgate United Synagogue, who served as a Flight Surgeon and Combat Doctor in the Israel Air Force on the Southern Front during the Yom Kippur War, for his kind permission to use his photographs from that time.

We thank Sir Martin and Lady Esther Gilbert for their kind permission to reproduce his map.

We thank US Living & Learning and Marketing departments for their dedicated work in producing this booklet. We are especially grateful to David Kaplan for being the impetus behind this project and to Rabbi Nicky Liss of Highgate United Synagogue for his assistance.
Letter from a Fallen Son

Morris Katz (1952 - 1973)

The late Morris Katz, zichrono livracha (may his memory be for a blessing), was a member of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation before going on Aliyah (moving to Israel). Tragically, he was killed in combat in the Yom Kippur War. To honour Morris's memory, we reproduce an article about him, from “A Voice Called: Stories of Jewish Heroism”, by Yossi Katz, with kind permission of Gefen Publishing House.

- Scottish Jew; made Aliyah to Israel in 1971
- Fought in 1973 Yom Kippur War
- Fell in battle along Suez Canal after writing to family in Scotland

“Only when more people will come here will Israel’s future be secure.”

“Yizkor,” the Hebrew word for “remember,” is also the name of a set of volumes published by Israel’s Ministry of Defense. The books contain the names, photographs and biographies of all the fallen in the ranks of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF or in Hebrew, Tzahal) during the wars for Israel’s independence and survival. Several volumes have already been published, and sadly, more are being prepared to include the fallen from the recent wars. Yizkor is not sold in bookstores but is given to the bereaved families of Israel’s war dead. While most of the thousands of names and stories remain unknown to all but a few family members and friends of the fallen, each page of Yizkor tells a story of Jewish heroism and sacrifice. It was while glancing through those pages that I came across the story of Morris Katz, of blessed memory. While we share the same last name, we are not directly related, although it was this similarity that first drew my attention to his story.

Morris (Moshe) Katz was born on April 17, 1952, in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was the son of Sylvia and Andre Katz. Morris attended public schools in Edinburgh and was active in the local chapter of Bnei Akiva, a religious-Zionist youth movement. It was in Bnei Akiva that Morris developed his deep love for Torah and Israel. When he finished high school, Morris elected to attend Bnei Akiva’s year-long programme in Israel located on Kibbutz Lavi. There Morris worked in the fields, toured the length and breadth of the country, studied Torah and spent hours wrestling with questions of Jewish identity and commitment. When the programme ended, Morris returned to Scotland and informed his parents that he had decided not to attend the University of Edinburgh, as originally planned, but that he had chosen to make Aliyah to Israel.
Morris arrived in Israel in 1971 and a year later was drafted, as are all Israeli citizens of appropriate age, into Tzahal, the Israel Defense Forces. He volunteered for an elite airbourne division of the Nahal, an infantry brigade of the Israel Defense Forces which combines military service with pioneering work on new border settlements. After basic training, Morris attended parachute jump school and then squad-commanders course, graduating as the company’s outstanding soldier.

In the summer of 1973, Morris asked the army for permission to visit his parents in Scotland and was told that in October he would be permitted to go on short leave for the said purpose. His plans had to be postponed when the Yom Kippur War broke out on October 6, 1973. On the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, Israel was surprise attacked by Egypt and Syria. Over eighty thousand Egyptian soldiers poured across the Suez Canal with only 436 Israeli soldiers positioned on the other side in defense. Morris took part in the heroic holding battles on the first days of the war along the Suez Canal but on October 19, 1973, he was killed instantly when his position took a direct hit from an Egyptian Katyusha rocket. He was buried on Kibbutz Lavi and was survived by his parents and a sister, Sharon.

“Only when more people will come here will Israel’s future be secure.”

Shortly before his death, Morris wrote a letter from the Sinai battlefield to his “adopted” father on Kibbutz Lavi, Simha Shulkovski. Morris enclosed in the envelope a second, sealed letter and asked Shulkovski to forward it to his parents in the tragic event that he was killed in the war. When Simha received word of Morris’s death, he sent the letter to the Katz family in Scotland. It read:

Dear Mother and Father,

You will be reading this letter only if something has happened to me. I want you to know that I have no regrets about what I have done and if I could live my life again I would choose the same path. I am sorry for what I have done to you, breaking your hearts, but I did what I felt I had to do.

I am proud of what I have done and I know that you are too. The State of Israel needs people and only when more people will come to live here will Israel’s future be secure. I hope that all that I have done will convince you and others to come to live in Israel. I want you to know that I love you and that I’m sorry we haven’t seen each other since I made
Aliyah. For the sake of my sister Sharon, and for your sake and mine, please don’t be sad. Be proud, smile and hold your heads up high!

It’s strange but I don’t know how to end this letter. It’s not the type of letter one writes every day and I’m not sure about the etiquette of such letters. Maybe it’s better if I don’t end it at all! I’ll just write:

Much Love…..Your Son, Morris

Today, few people in Israel or throughout the Jewish world know the name Morris Katz, yet it is anonymous heroes like him who have given us a Jewish state on a silver platter. There are over twenty-two thousand heroic stories like his in the pages of Yizkor. It is our hope and prayer that no new pages be added to this encyclopaedia of modern Jewish heroism. As Morris requested in his final letter, we should hold our heads up high and be proud Jews. And may his life be an inspiration to us all.

“Yizkor – may the loyal and valiant heroes of freedom and victory be sealed forever within the heart of Israel.”

(From the Yizkor prayer for the fallen of the Israel Defense Forces)
The Memorial Prayer

*For the Israeli soldiers and victims of terror:*

God, full of mercy, who dwells on high, grant fitting rest on the wings of the Divine Presence, in the heights of the holy, the pure and the brave, who shine like the radiance of heaven, to the souls of the holy ones who fought in any of Israel’s battles, in clandestine operations, and in Israel’s Defence Forces; who fell in battle, in terrorist atrocities, and who sacrificed their lives for the consecration of God’s name, for the people and the land, and for this we pray for the ascent of their souls. Therefore, Master of compassion, shelter them in the shadow of Your wings forever, and bind their souls in the bond of everlasting life. The Lord is their heritage; may the Garden of Eden be their resting place, may they rest in peace, may their merit stand for all Israel, and may they receive their reward at the End of Days, and let us say: Amen.
‘All Her Paths Are Peace’: Approaches to Warfare in Jewish Tradition

Rabbi Jonathan Hughes
Associate Rabbi, Hendon United Synagogue; US Living & Learning’s City Rabbi. Rabbi Hughes will shortly take up a new position as rabbi of Richmond United Synagogue.

In its 65 years, the battle-scarred State of Israel has faced several wars, none of which it has desired to fight. It constantly yearns for a secure, lasting peace with its neighbours. Tellingly, its armed forces are known as the Israel Defence Forces (IDF, or Tzahal in Hebrew) rather than ‘the Israeli army’ or a similar appellation.

In this spirit, I set out some thoughts below from Jewish sources which emphasise the critical importance of peace.

A life in accordance with the Torah is one underpinned by a dedication to the sacrosanct quest for Shalom (peace). Indeed, the Jewish nation’s most fervent desire for peace forms the signature of the concluding statement of the entire Talmud (the major work of Jewish Law and Ethics):

“The Holy One [God] found no vessel more capable of holding blessing for Israel than peace.” (Oktzin 3:12).

This benign sentiment is unequivocally underscored in Mishlei/Proverbs 3:17, words which are familiar to us since we recite them when returning the Sefer Torah to the Holy Ark:

“Her (the Torah’s) ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”

The Jewish people have endeavoured to live by this lofty motto for millennia and it was none other than the non-Jewish French philosopher, John-Paul Sartre, who declared in 1946, shortly after the Holocaust: ‘The Jews are the mildest of men, passionately hostile to violence. That obstinate sweetness which they conserve in the midst of the most atrocious persecution, that sense of justice and of reason which they put up as their sole defence against a hostile, brutal, and unjust society, is perhaps the best part of the message they bring to us and the true mark of their greatness.’
The root of this aversion to violence is encapsulated by the approach of our forefather, Jacob. When he was anticipating the attack of his nefarious brother, Esau, who was accompanied by an army of 400 men, the verse states in Bereishit/Genesis 32:8:

“Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.”

The Midrash, which contains early rabbinic commentaries to the Bible, cites Rabbi Judah ben Rabbi Ilai (2nd century CE), who asks:

‘Are not fear and distress identical? The meaning, however, is that Jacob was afraid lest he should be slain and distressed lest he should slay others.’

Which others? The Maharal of Prague (d.1609), a prominent Jewish thinker, understands that Esau himself was assumed to be an enemy whose obvious intention was to kill Jacob, thereby triggering a right of pre-emptive self-defence. Yet instead of instantly activating this, Jacob’s prime concern was to ascertain whether Esau’s men had been coerced to join his forces and that they had no intention of actively participating in the onslaught. Perhaps, reasoned Jacob, they did not deserve to die in war? The Maharal concludes that according to the letter of the law, Jacob would not have been acting unlawfully to kill these accomplices. By accompanying Esau, they had tacitly accepted the guilt of his enterprise. Nonetheless, Jacob’s distress indicates a keen Jewish sense of sensitivity to human life, even in the course of a legitimate military engagement.

Yet, despite Judaism’s dogged allegiance to peace, we do find certain passages in the Torah where it would seem that warfare is advocated, for example:

“When you wage a war against your enemies and God will give you victory over them ...” (Devarim/Deuteronomy, 21:10)

Moreover, Jewish law embraces the concepts of compulsory and optional wars — milchemet mitzvah and milchemet reshut respectively. Indeed, we find that some of the greatest spiritual leaders of the Jewish people — Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, King David, Rabbi Akiva — all led their nation into battle. Nevertheless, if we analyse the Torah’s concept of war with a discerning eye, we discover that the Jewish perspective on military engagement is predicated upon minimising violence.

Judaism utterly rejects the sentiment of the Latin proverb, “Inter arma silent leges” – “During war the law is silent”. This maxim expresses the view that war is not part of civilized human life or subject to the normative rules of morality. Indeed, for many
nations, war heralds the outburst of the primordial instincts of barbarism and survival - the battlefield often holds no place for ethical considerations. The Torah vehemently opposes this attitude. In the book of Devarim, it is made clear that owing to the potential negativity of war, it must yield to overarching principles of Divine law.

Indeed, the Torah promotes an attitude to war that is far from militaristic. The outlook is one of utmost contrition and self-control. The Jewish soldier does not approach the battlefield to the accompaniment of an impressive military orchestra, there is no inflammatory rhetoric boasting of glory and prowess. He is simply urged forward by the Kohen’s (priest’s) words of faith:

“For it is the Lord your God Who walks with you to fight for you against your enemies, to deliver you.” (Devarim 20:4)

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (d. 1270), also known as the ‘Ramban’ explains in his commentary to that verse that,

“He (the Kohen) warns them... that they should not rely on their bravery, thinking ‘We are heroes and men of valour for war’; rather, they should return their hearts to God and put their faith in His deliverance.”

Another indication of Judaism’s moral imperative, even in times of war, is manifest in Devarim 20:1:

“When you approach a city to wage war against it, you shall proclaim peace to it.”

The Sefer HaChinuch, a 13th century work, explains the virtue at the root of this commandment: “Since mercy is a good quality, and it is appropriate that we – of holy seed – conduct ourselves accordingly in all matters, therefore [we act with mercy] even towards pagan enemies.” War is, however, sometimes unavoidable. The Jewish nation is commanded by God not to turn the other cheek and allow itself to be driven into the sea. There is no mitzvah in allowing the Jewish people, the ambassadors of God on this earth, to be annihilated at the hands of its enemies. As the verse states in Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 3:8: ‘A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.”

Indeed, until the coming of the Messiah, we acknowledge the need to protect our communities, even if that entails killing in self-defence. Some things are too valuable to leave to the clutches of apathy. As the British philosopher John Stuart Mill (d. 1873) once said:
‘War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse.’

In fact, the word, ‘peace’ abjectly fails to adequately capture the essence of the Hebrew, ‘Shalom’. The former derives from the Latin pax meaning “freedom from civil disorder,”. However, even though the English word came into use in various personal greetings from c.1300 as a version of ‘Shalom’, something has definitely been lost in translation. The concept of Shalom is necessarily positive. It is not, like peace-pax, merely a negative absence of acrimony. Rather, it is the fulfilment of its etymology: shaleim, meaning ‘completeness’. There can be a veneer of accord and friendship, but that will not necessarily guarantee Shalom. Shalom is the pursuit of true harmony, of humanity reaching its destiny as the collective protagonist of faith and love, of Godliness and sanctity. Sometimes, the sword must be unsheathed when these truths are in danger of extinction.

As we think back to the chilling events of Yom Kippur 1973, our prayers for peace this Yom Kippur have an added poignancy. Our Shabbat and Yom Tov prayer for the State of Israel and its defence forces concludes by asking God to grant peace in Israel and to spread His covering of peace over the whole world. Let us all say, Amen.
A brief overview of the Yom Kippur War, October 1973

Rabbi Michael Laitner
Educational Programming Director, US Living & Learning; Assistant Rabbi, Finchley United Synagogue.

Background
The miraculous Israeli victory in the 1967 Six Day War left Israel in control of all of Jerusalem, the West Bank, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. Egypt and Syria, which had lost the Sinai and Golan respectively, refused to negotiate with Israel, vowing to win back territory and pride by military means instead. They continued hostilities, particularly through the Egyptian-launched War of Attrition of 1969-70 and support for Palestinian terrorism.

Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat, who succeeded Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970, initially sought to change direction. Israel was suspicious of his sincerity and would not relinquish territory to Egypt when it felt that its very survival was still at stake.

Sadat, together with the Syrians, then prepared for war, culminating in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Arab allies assisted by cutting oil supplies to the West, increasing political pressure on Israel. This was a particularly sensitive problem for the United States, embroiled in the Watergate scandal and not long withdrawn from Vietnam.

Despite Egyptian and Syrian preparations, both Israeli and American military intelligence, and by extension their respective political masters, failed to correctly analyse the situation.

The War
On 6 October 1973, Yom Kippur that year, Egypt and Syria launched powerful attacks against the Suez Canal and Golan Heights respectively, initially overwhelming the vastly outnumbered Israeli forces. The opening days of the war were among the darkest in Israeli history. Enemy forces, using sophisticated Soviet weaponry, advanced swiftly, inflicting heavy casualties on the Israeli forces. Syrian tanks were hours away from entering Galilee, en route to major population centres. Israel was running desperately short of military supplies.
Alarmed by the prospect of an Israeli defeat and Soviet success in the Middle East, the United States resupplied Israel.

In the Golan, where Syrian forces had inexplicably halted, Israeli forces regrouped, pushing them back.

The huge buffer of the Sinai Desert provided invaluable land to check the Egyptian advance. After the largest tank battle since the Second World War, Israeli forces repulsed the Egyptians, establishing a bridgehead on the Western Bank of the Suez Canal.

At this point, Egypt and Syria, supported by the Soviet Union, forced a ceasefire which came into effect on 24 October.

**Aftermath**

Israel lost more than 2,600 soldiers. A significant number of Israeli soldiers were held captive by enemy forces, who killed some of their captives. Disengagement Agreements were reached by 1975, following intense American ‘shuttle’ diplomacy. These led ultimately to President Sadat’s famous trip to Jerusalem in 1977 and the 1979 American-brokered Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Egypt considered that honour had been recovered, in spite of its defeat in 1973, which may have emboldened President Sadat’s peace overtures.

Israel, despite its victory, mourned the high human cost. National soul-searching after the Yom Kippur War led to political upheaval, as established political leaders made way for younger or opposition figures, such as Yitzchak Rabin and Menachem Begin respectively, as the 1970s progressed.
Jerusalem Memories, Yom Kippur 1973

Judy Fine
Rebbetzin, Cockfosters and N Southgate United Synagogue

Following our marriage around Purim time in 1973, what could have been more exciting than starting our new life together in Jerusalem? It seems almost unbelievable now that we were able to wander fearlessly through the Old City right up to the top of Har Hazeitim (the Mount of Olives), ending our trek with a soda at the iconic hotel called the Seven Arches! On Kol Nidre night, chilly feelings began to dispel the euphoric atmosphere which had existed since the Six-Day War. Rumours abounded that military call-ups had began, even that reservists had rushed away from the Kotel (Western Wall), to their units! As the television network was down for Yom Kippur normal call-up procedures could not be implemented.

I had been advised to remain in bed for that Yom Kippur, due to a very difficult pregnancy, so we had accepted an invitation to stay with friends in the Rechavia neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Davening (praying) in bed, I perhaps picked up more of the atmosphere than I would have done in shul where many people remained somewhat oblivious to what was happening in the streets. Traffic started to build up, sirens sounded, and there was lot of activity in the sky. My husband came home to check on me and related how he had been reprimanded by soldiers that he should not be on the streets.

Turning on the television after Yom Kippur, it was the faces of Defence Minister Moshe Dayan and Prime Minister Golda Meyer that relayed the news to us, rather than their words. Instinctively, we tried to call our parents back home to reassure them that we were safe, but it took until the next morning to get through. Looking out of the window through the night, we watched trucks transporting soldiers south to Sinai. Observing the shadowy silhouettes of the young men in the dark, one could only daven that they would return safely. They were sons, husbands, fathers, all so precious to those who probably were unable to say goodbye.

Despite the tumultuous days after Yom Kippur, people nonetheless built their Sukkah for the festival of Sukkot, a symbol of Jewish spirit in spite of adversity. It was though a very different country after Sukkot, even when the ceasefire started. The atmosphere was both eerie and sombre. There was a sense of foreboding. There were no men on the street and Jerusalem felt like a ghost town. A poignant memory, that will remain with me forever, was the empty spaces in the choir of Jerusalem’s Yeshurun Shul where we davened regularly on Friday night. I think of the choristers that would sing no more.
A Soldier’s Perspective

Yehuda Porat, interviewed by Rabbi Jonathan Hughes

Yehuda Porat, a relative of mine, was born in Krakow, Poland. At the age of 7, he emigrated with his mother to Israel, where he was educated before joining the Israel Defence Forces in 1971 at the age of 18 as his national service. As a civilian, he later went to university in Haifa and became a mechanical engineer.

What was your role in the Israeli army during the Yom Kippur War?

I was in an artillery unit. I began as the commander of a cannon and became an officer having graduated in April 1973. I was released from the army a couple of years after the war, in 1975.

What do you remember about being in the war?

I fought in the front line in the Sinai. We had seen the Egyptian Army manoeuvring, but we were told that there would not be an attack. Dust was seen tens of kilometres away as their army was on the move for three weeks. We were told the night before that the attack would begin the next day - 6th October at 6pm - but actually Egyptian planes began shooting all over the area at 1pm.

It was not pleasant for the first week. We were surrounded by the Egyptian Army, had to retreat on the first day and then moved to another front line. We had been very close to the Suez Canal, but we relocated back 3-5 kilometres. We were there from 7th October. The first attempted ceasefire was on the 21st, but the first ‘official’ ceasefire was only on the 23rd. Other than that, we were moving and shooting day and night throughout the war. We were surrounded and then we moved. They were ‘interesting’ days. We had plans, but often did not get to implement them. We just had to master the chaos of war. We did not really know what was going on, constantly on the move. They had so many cannons - many more than we had - they could just shoot arbitrarily and, at times, we simply had to wait and ‘bite the bullet’.

How did you find out that the tide was turning?

The military radio eventually informed us that we were winning. Our senior officer was talking and we understood from his conversation that we were winning. We had also seen reserve divisions coming into the battle and we then knew we had enough forces to combat the opposition. Then we started to move forwards towards the Suez Canal, which we crossed and ended up 100 kilometres from Cairo. But it was really tough - we lost over 2,600 soldiers and many others were wounded.
Did you ever feel in mortal danger?
We didn’t know whether we would survive, especially during the first week. They were shooting at us the whole time with shells. We wore heavy armour to protect us to a certain extent, but too close and you’re dead. I was aware of the danger on the inside, but on the outside I had to be calm as I was the commander of my unit. But people around me were getting wounded or killed. I was among the luckiest ones. This was the toughest war for Israel after the War of Independence in 1948.

Did you come face-to-face with the enemy?
Yes, they attacked us from day one. We had to shoot with our cannons to force them to retreat. In fact, some Egyptian soldiers accidentally approached us not knowing that we were Israelis. There was no GPS. Needless to say, they retreated pretty quickly!

How did you feel when the war was over?
Relieved. I didn’t believe it was over. I thought they were joking. We hadn’t slept properly for 23 days and we had worn out the cannons which had to be replaced after the war, we had shot so many shells. Everyone was very tired - we spent two days sleeping. Also, we could then take a shower. We had only had one shower in all that time, which was done using a jerry can in the middle of the desert!

What do you think the lasting significance of the Yom Kippur War is?
The lesson is to make peace before war starts. Only in the movies are there heroes; the reality of war is death and bad memories. According to the history books, it could have been handled differently, but it is difficult to say.

Did the war change your life?
Yes, of course. Overnight. You change very quickly from being inexperienced to being very mature. Your perspective on life changes and you realise what is truly important in life. You realise that the small things we get caught up in do not matter.

What is your message for young British Jews today?
They should contribute to British society as much as possible, but I think that they should also visit Israel, to see what it is and they can decide for themselves whether they would like to live there. British immigrants have made a fantastic contribution to Israeli life and the British community, through its institutions and charities, such as its youth movements, has been incredibly supportive of Israel. Wherever Jews live, they should always support the State of Israel which is at the heartbeat of Jewish life. I am really gratified that the United Synagogue has produced this booklet to this end and that its communities are so supportive of Israel. We must all appreciate the lessons of the Yom Kippur War, a time which we hope and pray we will never experience again.
US Living & Learning supports our communities primarily by providing educational and social programming resources. It works with our rabbis, rebbetzins and other US departments, helping communities to share best practice.

Current and recent work includes a new Shiva House prayer book, Tribe Children’s Siddur, Jewish Online Guides instructional videos (www.theus.org.uk/jog), the US Living Judaism Course, heritage tours, a new Cheder curriculum, Aleph Champ Hebrew Reading course for the UK, short courses, scholar-in-residence visits to communities and community residential Shabbatonim.

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Sir Martin Gilbert, a member of Highgate United Synagogue, is not only one of the world’s outstanding historians, but also someone who has educated readers around the globe about Jewish history in particular. We express our deepest appreciation to Sir Martin and Lady Gilbert and continue to pray for Sir Martin to have a refuah sheleimah, a speedy recovery.

This booklet was produced by the United Synagogue Living & Learning Department, compiled by Rabbi Michael Laitner.