

Yom Kippur: Forgiveness, Hope and Inspiration for Jews

This week, Jews around the world observe Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It marks the conclusion of a 10-day period, starting with Rosh Hashanah, of deep reflection, prayer and repentance. We literally stand before God, one on one, and beseech His judgment for ourselves and our families for a good year to come.

Yom Kippur is marked as a day of fasting, during which our focus and attention is inward and, vis-a-vis God, not worried about material things. For that reason, we do not use makeup or any adornments such as jewelry. Fasting goes along with not shaving or bathing. We don't wear leather shoes and do not have marital relations.

Liturgically, we read from the Torah—Leviticus 16:1-34—about the Yom Kippur worship in the temple and pray for the ability to restore the temple and worship Him there. One of the most stirring prayers (with a deep history I am happy to share offline if you contact me at firstpersonisrael@) underscoring God's kingship and our repentance goes like this:

Let us now relate to the power of this day's holiness, it is awesome and frightening. On it, Your Kingship will be exalted; Your throne will be firmed with kindness and You will sit upon it in truth. It is true that You alone are the One Who judges, proves, knows and bears witness; Who writes and seals, counts and calculates Who remembers all that was forgotten. You will open the Book of Chronicle—it will read itself, and everyone's signature is in it. The great shofar will be sounded and a still, this sound will be heard. Angels will hasten, a trembling and terror will seize them, and they will say, "Behold it is the Day of Judgment, to muster the heavenly host for judgment!" for they cannot be vindicated in Your eyes in

judgment. All mankind will pass before You like members of the flock. Like a shepherd pasturing his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall You cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living and You shall apportion the fixed needs of all Your creatures and inscribe their verdict.

While God imbues our lives every day in so many ways, I find this the most intense, most personal, most awesome time—and sometimes even a little bit scary, in the sense that I dig to my deepest core to be sure I am being as honest and faithful to Him and the way He wants me to live. Yet in accounting for faults, I worry that maybe I forgot something.

This week, as Jews throughout the world stand humbly before God, throughout Israel thoughts of Yom Kippur past will be on the minds of many. No, it's not like Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with the ghost of Christmas past, present and future. This is an inevitable connection Israelis make to the surprise attack launched against us on Yom Kippur, our most holy day, 40 years ago. Nearly 3,000 Israelis were killed and 10,000 injured defending Israel during this war that was, by far, one of the most fierce and severe in our history.

In fact, at the beginning it seemed that Israel might have been on the verge of losing. But with the support and prayers of many and the tireless defense of the Israel Defense Forces and, of course, by the grace of the God of Israel, we turned the corner and pushed the Egyptians and Syrians back to the doorsteps of Cairo and Damascus.

Other than it being a significant anniversary, the connection between the war on two fronts then and the instability on these same two fronts today is eerily unsettling. With threats coming from new fronts now, including Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza, it's hard not to see similarities.

Albeit with things changing daily today and no sense what the

outcome will be, it's also hard not to connect the dots of geopolitical events of the early 1970s that led to the Yom Kippur War and those today. Then, threats emanated from Soviet-backed Arab aggressors seeking military victory and hegemony in the Middle East at a peak of the Cold War between the U.S. and USSR. Today Russia backs enemies of Israel with significant and sophisticated military hardware while also challenging the U.S. and its allies in the region, many of which are not so pro-Israel, to put it nicely.

While it's hard to say what will happen, it's not looking like anything particularly good that will bring peace or stability to the region or safety and security for Israel is anywhere on the horizon.

One remarkable thing that stood out in 1973 gives hope and inspiration for today. With things at the beginning of the Yom Kippur War going very badly for Israel, Israel's leaders were in desperate need of resupplying military hardware. For some reason, Prime Minister Golda Meir was not getting the kind of support from the U.S. that was needed, and so she reached out a leading Christian evangelical figure to intercede with President Nixon directly to help Israel at its most dire moment.

To the extent that happened is relevant in a few ways. First, of course, it's no little thing to have an influential Christian leader who understands Israel's biblical and prophetic role to be involved personally to save Israel from disaster.

Since then, the rise in support for Israel among Christians in the U.S. and throughout the world has radically changed the modern geopolitical and religious dynamic. As I shared some concerns with a friend this week in Arkansas, he reassured me of the wide Christian support for Israel.

We know, value, appreciate and cherish the unconditional love

and support that comes from so many corners of the earth. To the extent that God always has our back and we trust Him, in the same way one person interceded then, we are comforted by the prayers and support that come from so many millions today. If God used one person as His hand to help save Israel then, we know that no matter what may face us, Christians who love and pray for Israel do the same today.

Liturgical prayers and thoughts of who shall live and who shall die bring back memories from 40 years ago among children whose fathers were killed then and are now raising their own children, some of whom are in the army as well. Indeed, we worry whether the threats from Iran and Syria might make one's death not only impending but particularly gruesome as we utter these prayers.

Yom Kippur ends with the sounding of the shofar and the joyous singing of "Next Year in Jerusalem." May God inscribe and seal you and your loved ones in the Book of Life, and may this be the dawn of an era that continues to bring Jews and Christians together through everything we have in common, and particularly our role fulfilling His prophesy regarding Israel.

Jonathan Feldstein is the director of Heart to Heart, a unique virtual blood donation program to bless Israel and save lives in Israel. Born and educated in the U.S., Feldstein emigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a weekly column for Charisma's Standing With Israel.