



Grant Them Atonement

Yom Kippur Special

I stood at the foot of the hill with a helmet on my head. During the days of the Yom Kippur War I learned that there were a few failed attempts to retake Mount Hermon. The Hermon has a strategic significance, and was captured by the Syrian at the beginning of the war together with other parts of the Golan Heights, and towards the end of the war remained the only point which was not retaken by the IDF.

The US was pushing for a cease fire, and it became clear that if the Hermon was not retaken in the next day it would be lost. The Government decided to make a last attempt at taking the mountain. I was asked to address the soldiers before they embarked on their mission. I found the soldiers tense but ready. I was about to address them but then a troop of comedians touring the outposts came. I was asked to allow the troop to perform before I addressed the soldiers. I agreed and stepped aside.

One of the performers saw me in the crowd, and then said: "I can't begin my act with Rabbi Grossman here, it would be inappropriate." He gave me a small Tehillim (Psalms) book and asked me sit aside and read it until he finished his act. "I can't work like this", he said. I offered to work together. The stunned performer agreed. I got up and began to sing the following words to a known Israeli tune: "During Yom Kippur our prayers were disturbed by our enemies. May this serve as our atonement." The soldiers joined me. I told them to point at Syria, and we sang: "May they serve as atonement for the Jewish People."

I told them what the Torah teaches us what to do during a time of crisis: "When you go out to war against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, you shall not be afraid of them, for the Lord, your G-d is with you Who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And it will be, that when you approach the battle, the Cohen shall come near, and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel, today you are going battle against your enemies. Let your hearts not be faint; you shall not be afraid, and you shall not be alarmed, and you shall not be terrified because of them. For the Lord, your G-d, is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you."¹ The Cohen tells all to gather and become as one. Only then will they be victorious.

Our Sages learn from the words "**Hear, O Israel**" that even if the soldiers' only merit is their reciting of the Shema² this is enough to redeem them.

"Dear soldiers", I continued, "The entire state is watching you, waiting for your success. No one here knows what will be with him in the next coming hours. These may be your last moments."

All were startled. "What would you like to do during these crucial hours?" I asked, "Hear jokes or recite the Shema?" They roared unanimously: "Recite the Shema."

Their victory is G-d's victory, I told them. When you accept the yoke of Heaven G-d fights for you, "For the Lord, your G-d, is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you." Be sure of G-d's victory.

All stood up and covered their heads with their barrettes. We recited the Shema together and then stated "G-d is the Lord." The excitement was indescribable. Immediately after we concluded the order to ascend the hill was given. The area at once became a battle zone.

I have recently met with Shimon Sheves, Yitzchak Rabin's "right-hand" man. He told me he is writing a book and has dedicated a chapter to me. He told me he was one of the commanders during that fatal day. "We wanted to attack on the northern side, but then learned that the Syrians were waiting there. We changed the plans, knowing that the new approach would claim heavy losses. We were stalled by your address, and then at its conclusion we noticed that the Syrians have changed their position again, so we rerouted to the north again, and in this way prevented many casualties."

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we mention the name of the Lord our G-d."³The soldiers' cries of "Shema" are what won the war.

¹ Dvarim 20: 1 – 4.

² Shema Yisrael are the first two words of a section of the Torah, and is the of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. The first

verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one"

³ Tehillim 20:8.