

# Yom Kippur: A beautiful story

- Basil Herring

Subject: A beautiful Yom Kippur story

Rabbi Simcha Hakohen Kook, Chief Rabbi of Rehovot, tells this story:  
Beseeching G d with a Tank

The eve of Yom Kippur is a busy time for Rabbis, but last Yom Kippur I received a most inspiring question. A young soldier, an American named Motti, called me from a town in Gaza called Netzarim. This latest Intifada started on Rosh Hashanah so by Yom Kippur the fighting was quite fierce in Gaza. At first I questioned the soldier.

"You don't mean you are in Netzarim, you mean you are in an army base near Netzarim."

"No," came the reply, I am in Netzarim.

I knew that there was only two ways to reach Netzarim. By tank or by helicopter at night. So I asked him: "How did you get there?"

"I told my commander that it was my custom to go to the Mikva [ritual purification bath] before Yom Kippur and the only Mikva around was in the Jewish community of Netzarim. So he let me use a tank."

Now came the reason for the young soldier's call: "I am borrowing a Torah scroll from the community synagogue to take back to the base. And the Jews of Netzarim have donated enough Tziziot [garment with fringes] for my whole platoon. My question is, what kind of Yom Kippur Tefilla [service] can I conduct. Besides myself there is only one other Orthodox soldier on the base. Most of the other soldiers have, believe it or not, never attended a Yom Kippur service in their lives."

"Don't worry," I assured him. You just conduct the service and you instruct them to say "Amen" to your blessing and it will be as if they were praying themselves."

The soldier called me after Yom Kippur to tell me that the Tefilla turned out to be the most incredible davening of his life. "All the soldiers put on the Tziziot provided by the Jewish community of Netzarim. They listened attentively as I led the davening and answered "Amen" to my blessing. I read from the Torah and my friend and I took turns being called up to the Torah. Soon other soldiers requested to be called to the Torah and I showed them

which blessing to make. We ended calling up no less than 20 soldiers to the Torah that day."

As you can imagine I was greatly inspired by the courage and determination of this young man. In fact his phone call right before the start of Yom Kippur inspired me to deliver what was probably the most effective sermon of my career. I spoke before a packed audience before Kol Nidrei. I got up in front of them and I said:

"Dear friends, I want to pray to G d. You are all invited to listen, but I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to G d."

"Dear G d, there are many countries in this great world of yours who have armies. And many of these armies have tanks. Some have many tanks and some have fewer tanks. But G d, is there another country in this world that used a tank to help someone go to the Mikva before Yom Kippur? Is there another country that used a tank to bring a Torah to an army base so they could have a Minyan for Yom Kippur? G d, only in Israel are tanks used this way so you must protect your country Israel."