

## Israel Today and 56 Years Ago: Remembering May 1967

In May 1967 I was studying (mostly procrastinating) for my Bar Mitzvah. As best I can remember, I was paying more attention to news about Israel than I was to reviewing my Torah portion. Arab armies on three sides were preparing to go on the attack and surrounding Israel with only the sea behind it, looming like a watery graveyard. The possibility of a war of annihilation was real. Fear gripped the Jewish community. My mother, a Holocaust survivor, took me to a rally held in the Armory in Pikesville, Maryland, where we lived. It was packed and tense. A huge picture of the Warsaw Ghetto and the words "Never Again" were posted at the front of the cavernous room. No matter how bright the spring days were back then, it seemed like a dark shadow was enveloping the Jewish world.

On June 5, the '67 war broke out and, miraculously, within a relatively short amount of time, news began to flow of a sweeping Israeli victory. Fear turned into jubilation, anxiety transformed into pride. "We" were winning, I said to myself. I was one with Israel. "We" had become part of me.

The 1967 War permanently and completely changed my Jewish identity. Within two years, I found myself on a teen tour to Israel, awed by the sight of a "Jewish airplane" at JFK which would carry me to the shores of my ancestral homeland. Upon landing, I was enthralled by the sight of soldiers everywhere across Israel and proud of the scrapyards of captured Syrian military equipment in the Golan. The spirit of those days fully informed who I had become as an American Jew.

But today, a month after the October 2023 Hamas Pogrom, it is the emotional memory of May 1967 which has resurfaced in my psyche. With the fear of Hezbollah launching massive rocket attacks from the north, the West Bank exploding in violence, an Arab-Iranian summit taking place in Saudi Arabia and violent anti-Israel and anti-Semitic protests escalating around the world, including on American college campuses, it feels like we are being driven into a cul-de-sac of hatred and anti-Jewish genocide.

At this moment, Israel is fighting to reestablish security on its borders and in the hearts of its people. IDF soldiers are responding with incredible bravery. The feelings of insecurity released during the early days of the 1973 Yom Kippur War are out of the box and challenging us to feel safe and to know that Israel is safe again. Reports that mezzuzot are being removed to camouflage Jewish identity and that anti-Zionist vandals are tearing down signs of Israeli hostages are compounding our collective anxiety. As during the ancient Exodus, this is "a night of watching."

We are at a terrible crossroads in modern Jewish history. Is there a path to peace and security? No one knows the future but, for sure, the Jewish people knows its past. Across the centuries comes a voice: you will prevail. It will be impossibly difficult but, with faith and courage, "we" will continue our journey to a better tomorrow.