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A WAR STORY FROM MY COLLEAGUE AT ASCENT – OCT. 2023

My name is **Arbel Zechariah**. I am 42 years old and married. I work for 'Ascent of Safed' (Tsfat). I have been a part of Ascent's IDF educational department for 18 years. Besides giving talks, I play three musical instruments and conduct guided tours and Bar/Bas Mitzvahs in the Old City of Safed.

Last Thursday morning [Oct. 19], my wife was at work and my house was like a battle zone. The war had closed the daycare centers and schools for my six children, and I was losing the battle.

Then I got the call. "Arbel, one of our soldiers is getting married in two hours."

"The bride is simply not willing to postpone her wedding to the man of her dreams. Even if it means giving up the exquisite wedding party she had planned for over a year and limiting her guest list to immediate family and friends."



"We need you to make this wedding¹ a blast!" said Rabbi Ari Brod, the manager of **Ascent's Army Division**.

"After the wedding, continue with the original plan to visit three bases on the Northern border to lift the spirits of soldiers who will be spending another Shabbat away from home."

With G-d's help, I found a babysitter (not simple in these days of tension) and sped to Ascent. Yosef and Tal, the two other musicians, were already there and we loaded the sound equipment into my eight person MPV.²

Before racing to the wedding, an hour's drive away, every millimeter of remaining space in the car was stuffed with challah rolls, wine and other Shabbat essentials for soldiers at border outposts. (Ascent distributed over **13,000** challah rolls last Shabbat and **10,000** the week before).

¹ Photo is of a different wedding.

² Multi-Purpose Vehicle.

With well over 100,000 of our finest protecting the border, the IDF was unable to supply all of the troops with all of their physical needs. We at Ascent took on to help fill the lack.

Just close your eyes and imagine. As we drive up, the bride and groom, Ma'ayan and Chaim, who had arrived shortly before for the *chupah* (wedding canopy), are being serenaded by over 400 *Golani* (infantry) soldiers singing ***Am Yisrael Chai!*** (*The Nation Of Israel Lives.*)

Without any notice, one of Israel's top recording artists, also called up with the other 360,000 reservists, **Idan Amedi**, surprised the entire crowd and brought the bride to tears by singing under the chupah as we three accompanied him.

Idan had to rush back to his base of Combat Engineers, so we continued alone.

The soldiers erupted in wild dancing as they joined us, singing [in Hebrew] "We are believers, the sons of believers, and have no one to rely on other than our Father in Heaven".

Their dancing was so intense that it melted away almost two weeks of tension! Ma'ayan and Chayim were overwhelmed with joy.

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After 40 minutes of nonstop dancing and singing, the base commander called out to us, "Cut the music now. Our unit is being called to the border!"

One more song and the soldiers boarded buses to their mission and we were off to the next base.

To protect the soldiers, the IDF did not tell us where our next gig was, Rather, we were met by a jeep at a junction on the way to Nahariya and they escorted us to the base.

Just as we started playing, **the air raid sirens shrieked.**

Into the bunker with 200 soldiers - our captive audience! - as the doors were bolted shut.

As the bombing became louder and more frequent, the singing intensified. More and more soldiers singing songs of hope, prayer, and yearning for victory and peace that shattered the gates of Heaven and exploded into a joy-filled dance. Bomb shelters have great acoustics!

We came to give them strength, but they ended up strengthening us!

An hour and a half of bombing passed in minutes. With the all-clear siren we rushed out, late for our next concert.

We were already packed and in the car, when a bus of religious soldiers returned from a mission. Seeing our guitars and drums, they implored us to stay and pray the afternoon prayers with them before the sun set, and then play one song to lift their spirits.

One song led to another and we probably sang another four or five before the jeep escorting us to the next base forced us to depart.

After another 35-minute drive we arrived at a checkpoint where we were told that the situation had heated up. Too dangerous to continue.

When the road finally opened, we received word that the unit we were going to play for had been mobilized; we would have to move on to the final scheduled show.

After 20 more minutes of driving, we were once again stopped at a roadblock. The soldiers said that we would have to wait for things to calm down before we could proceed.

It was dark, we were exhausted, and our wives were demanding we come home. Not only were they afraid for us, they needed help with the children and the preparations for Shabbat.

The young corporal escorting us pleaded with us to continue on. Nevertheless, the demands of our wives prevailed and we started our return to Tsfat.

A minute later the young corporal was on the phone again. The roads had been opened and he begged us to return.

Our hearts told us we could not let down 150 soldiers and then a small miracle occurred: our wives gave us another hour for the cause!

As before, the soldiers did not want us to stop playing or singing. We give them an island of stability and sanity in a world that has gone insane. With G-d's help, we fuel them with hope and strength, and they want to get as much as they can before going back to the grind of war.

When I arrived home at close to 11 pm, I spent a half hour with my kids who had stayed up late to see their Abba and then...

I got the call.

“Arbel” Ari said, “Tomorrow the IDF needs us to do 17 concerts before Shabbat. I need you to help arrange **5 teams** to tackle this mission.”

My wife and I were speechless. We had prepared nothing for Shabbat. But what could we say? **Israel needs us!**

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Arbel Zachariah’s personal message:

I hope I was successful in giving you a taste of the impact of the 23 concerts we did for 1850 soldiers last Thursday and Friday.

And that is why I am writing this. Rabbi Leiter, our executive director, tells me ASCENT is running out of funds for this and other imperative efforts for the IDF and refugees.

My wife and I are doing everything we can for Israel.

The staff of Ascent is doing everything we can for Israel

THE SOLDIERS NEED you to donate so we can continue.

<https://www.jgive.com/new/en/usd/donation-targets/110203/recent-donations>.

Please be as generous as you can. And please spread the word.

With love for the Jewish People and prayers for a true and lasting peace,

Arbel Zechariah @
ASCENT of SAFED
Oct. 23, 2023

Thank you and bless you.

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DEDICATED by the staffs of ASCENT-of-SAFED and KABBALAONLINE:
for the soul elevations of the 1400+ Jews and other Israelis who were viciously murdered by bloodthirsty bestial terrorists;
and for the immediate rescue a/o release of the 200+ hostages, held in cruel captivity by them;
and for the speedy and complete recovery for the 4500+ injured;
and that the ONE Above should shower the close and extended family members -- tens of thousands!-- of the martyrs with divine consolations and only happy occasions and good news from now on.