

## War and Peace in Judaism Worksheet: Suggested Answers

### PEACE AS A UTOPIA

#### **Source 1: Isaiah 2:1-4 1**

1. In verse 3 this source speaks of many people recognizing God, and worshipping Him. Which people do you think Isaiah is speaking of? One way of interpreting this source is that the people are the nations of the world, and the utopia described will be achieved when all people come to commit to the values of ethical monotheism (not necessarily Judaism). This approach can introduce the debate of the role that the Jewish people can play as a “light unto the nations” in bringing about this religious and moral renaissance.

2. Explain the allegory of verse 4. The tools that have until now been used for war and destruction can be used for peaceful activities, such as food production. A contemporary reading of this text will bring us to question the billions of dollars spent by governments on weapons of mass destruction, while there is starvation and poverty in many places in the world.

3. This source speaks of a messianic utopian future. What two things does Isaiah say will be central to this time?

1. A universal recognition of ethical monotheism by the nations of the world and a recognition of God and Judaism by Jews.

2. An era of world peace where nations will no longer wage war on each other.

#### **Source 2: Isaiah 11:6-9 4**

4. Continuing this theme, what else does Isaiah describe will happen when the Messiah comes? All creatures of violence and power will no longer dominate and destroy weaker species. There will be a universal peace.

5. In your opinion, is this allegorical or literal? You may want to mention to your students that Maimonides and Nachmanides disagree about this interpretation. Nachmanides says that during the messianic era, the rules of nature will be suspended, and the things described in this source will actually take place. Predators and their prey will sit together in peace. Maimonides disagrees and suggests that this is an allegory for nations and people. Strong powerful nations will no longer try and destroy weaker nations, and world peace will be achieved. Maimonides is of the opinion that messianic times will be achieved through natural means and that the laws of nature will apply as before. \

#### **Source 3: The United Nations Charter**

6. The United Nations buildings in New York are adorned with a quote from Source 1 above. How does its charter compare to the vision that Isaiah describes?

7. Do you think they are fulfilling their charter?

8. What do you think Jews must do to bring about the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies? Do you think they are doing all they should? Note: These questions are designed to trigger a thinking process aiming to allow the student to see the Biblical texts in a contemporary context. Answers are subjective.

## PEACE WITHIN JUDAISM

### Source 1

1. What does Hillel mean when he says that "the world stands" on these three values? Without these three values, the world would not be able to exist. This could mean that the spiritual/metaphysical impact of these values being absent would be so devastating that the world would cease to exist. It is more likely that Hillel meant that without these three values, society would not be able to function. For people to live and interact, these three values are necessary, or society would fall into chaos, like those biblical societies that were destroyed by God (Generation of the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc.).

2. Why do you think he has chosen these three? Would you choose differently? Without these three values governing citizens, society would collapse since these values help man live side by side with his neighbor. It may be interesting to note that as with many groupings of 'threes' in Talmudic sources, each one represents a type of relationship that man has: man and man, man and God, and man and himself (e.g. the three cardinal sins, repentance, charity and prayer that change God's decree on Yom Kippur, etc.). Truth governs the relationship between man and God, man needs to know in himself that there is justice in this world, and finally, peace is an ultimate value that governs the way we relate to our fellow man.

3. Can you think of situations where these values conflict with each other? These three will often be found in conflict in the real world. Sometimes, as in sources 3-9, the truth of the Torah and *Mitzvot* need to be compromised for the sake of peace. God is often said to waive His right to act according to justice to maintain peace (i.e. not punishing Israel when they deserve to be punished).

4. If you had to choose one above the others, which would it be? Out of the three types of relationships, those between man and man are the most pressing, filling our everyday reality. Therefore, the value that governs these relationships – peace – becomes the most relevant and important. Theoretically, it may not be so, but practically, these sources suggest that it must be so. Having said that, this question allows the students to use their own powers of reason and thought, and as long as they can justify their answer, there can be no incorrect approach.

### Source 2

5. Why is Aaron an example of a 'lover of peace'? Can you bring proof of your knowledge of Aaron in the *Midrash*? In midrashic sources, Aaron is seen as the ultimate lover of peace, often investing his time and energy in bringing people together.

6. What is the difference between loving peace and pursuing peace? Loving peace is a theoretical value and ideology, but pursuing it shows a commitment to actually achieving it, even

at personal cost (time, money, and energy). Aaron was not just a talker on this subject, but he actually went about achieving his goals.

7. Are the values of loving/pursuing peace and loving people, and bringing them back to the Torah connected in any way? All of these values are grounded in a love of humanity and fellow man. Aaron loved peace because he loved his fellow man. This is the same reason that he wished to bring them close to the Torah. A person who believes that Torah and Judaism represent the ideal lifestyle may try to convince the people he cares for that they should follow this lifestyle. So too, will a peace-loving man try to bring peace into the lives of his fellow man.

### **Sources 3-9**

8. In these 6 sources, peace is presented as an ultimate value above many other values. Do you agree? Can you think of a value that is more important than peace?

9. Why do you think that source 3 suggests that peace is more important than all the other *mitzvot*? These two questions are similar to questions 2-4 and should be approached in the same way. The aim is to further encourage students to approach peace as a value that can often be in conflict with other values or concepts and to evaluate whether it always takes priority over other values.

10. Source 6 suggests that Israel merited receiving the Torah because they are a people of peace. Would you say this to be true? Explain your answer. For the students to evaluate, and decide. Concepts that could be considered are the role the Jewish people play at the moment in the world, including in Israel, the way the world perceives the Jewish people, and the role and responsibility that the Jewish people have to take in the context of bringing messianic times closer (i.e. a light unto the nations etc.).

## **WAR WITHIN JUDAISM**

### **Source 1 Part 1 – verses 1-4 – The role of God and religion in warfare**

1. Why do you think it is the *kohen* that is addressing the people on this matter, and why is he speaking about God and the Exodus in the context of war? The *kohen* is a spiritual leader who represents God to the people, and the people to God. It is therefore fitting that it is he who is speaking to the people on the issue of God's role in war. The *kohen* is in a position to convince the people of God's role (protector and fighter on behalf of His people). The *kohen* promises the people that God is with them and they will therefore be successful. Just as God was victorious over the Egyptians and successfully took the people out of slavery (the only previous military victory that they had at this time as a point of reference), so He will ensure victory in any future war. This is both designed to ease any fear of defeat and death that the people have, but also to remind them that not only do they have God on their side, but the upper moral hand, as the war they are about to fight is one sanctioned by God.

### ***Part 2 – verses 5-9 – Those not fit for war***

2. Who is speaking to the people now? What do you think their role is? Why doesn't the kohen continue with this topic? The kohen has completed his discourse on the theology of war and therefore ends his speech. The officers were military leaders, who now address the people on the military matter of conscription.

3. Which categories of people are exempt from conscription? Why do you think this is? The following people are exempt from conscription: One who has built a new house, planted a vineyard or betrothed a wife, one who has yet to have enjoyed the use of a new acquisition, and one who is scared to fight. These exemptions can either be approached from an ethical point of view (i.e. that it is not fair or moral to force someone in any of these situations to have to leave their home, vineyard, or wife and fight or to force someone who is scared to the front line) or a practical point of view. On a practical level, the men listed are less likely to be good soldiers, as their minds may be elsewhere, and not totally focused on the task at hand. They may be a liability in a war situation and are therefore exempt from fighting. In the case of the soldier who is scared to fight, the text suggests that we are worried that he may influence the soldiers around him, which is a much more pressing concern, and therefore the Torah exempts him immediately.

4. Do you think that a conscientious objector is included in any of these categories? If so, which one? If not, do you think they were also exempt? Do you think there was such a thing as a conscientious objector in biblical warfare? It is very difficult to include a conscientious objector in any of the categories above. There is no record of someone who was against serving in an army commanded by God, perhaps because it is hard to question a war that has been commanded by God. (Maybe we can say that Avraham was the first conscientious objector as he argued with God against destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, there he was not obligated to be involved in the destruction so it is not a complete analogy).

### ***Part 3 – verses 10-18 – Peace treaties and the Seven Canaanite Nations***

5. Why do you think the Israelite army is commanded to subjugate a people that have made a peace treaty with them? This refers to a case where the Land of Israel is involved (either the conquering of the Land of Israel or the expanding its borders). In order to exert sovereignty over the nation and land the Israelites were fighting, they were forced to subjugate them. They were not, however, allowed to kill, destroy, or plunder, because a peace treaty had been made (see also Rambam in source 6).

6. What do you think about the ethics of the advice given to a city that has not made a peace treaty with Israel? Is this policy internationally acceptable in contemporary warfare? It is for the students to decide on what they think the ethics of warfare should be. It is feasible to conclude that anyone who proves a potential military risk (i.e. every male) should be destroyed. A man who surrenders of course must be saved and protected, under the condition that his surrendering constitutes a peace treaty and all that goes with that (i.e. commitment to ethical monotheism).

7. Why do you think that the army must destroy all inhabitants of a city of one of the seven Canaanite nations? (The text suggests a reason – what do you think of this reason?) Would this be internationally acceptable in contemporary warfare? There are two reasons intimated in the text. Firstly, if these nations are immoral and do not keep the basic laws of morality (seven mitzvot of the sons of Noah) then they deserve death as a punishment (as decided and only when decided by God because this is a divinely commanded war). Secondly, the text advises that if you were not to destroy all of these nations in their entirety, then you run the risk of being influenced by them at a later date to worship idols. This must be avoided at all costs. (See also *Sefer HaChinuch*, source 5.)

#### **Part 4 – verses 19-20 – War and the environment**

8. Why do you think the laws of protecting the environment are found in the context of war and not a normal situation? War is an extreme situation in which one might think other areas of morality such as environmental ethics could be suspended. The Torah wishes to teach us that if we have to be sensitive to the environment in a time of war, then we certainly have to protect it during normal times.

9. This source seems to value trees above human life when it asks rhetorically “Is the tree of the field a man that it should be besieged by you? Did the trees cause you any harm?” What message do you think this has for us? The Torah seems to speak ‘tongue in cheek’ and suggests that if mankind wishes to destroy themselves, then that is one thing, but it doesn’t mean they can destroy the environment.

#### **Source 2**

10. What is the first and foremost reason that we have a *mitzvah* to destroy the seven Canaanite nations? Because we are commanded to by God. The *Sefer Hachinuch* proves this by quoting two verses from *Devarim* (7:2 and 20:17) and for a God-fearing Jew this is enough justification. This may spur a debate about whether we should submit to all commandments even if they seem to go against our intellect and sense of morality.

11. The *Sefer Hachinuch* hints at two moral justifications for this *Mitzvah*. What are they and what do you think about them? This is the same discussion as source 1 (question 7). Firstly, if these nations are immoral and do not keep the basic laws of morality (seven *mitzvot* of the sons of Noah) then they deserve death as a punishment (as decided and only when decided by God because this is a divinely commanded war). Secondly, the text advises that if you were not to destroy all of these nations in their entirety, then you run the risk of being influenced by them at a later date to worship idols. This must be avoided at all costs.

12. Does this justify the destruction of a whole people though? It is possible to approach this sensitive question in three ways:

1. It could be that the whole nation was involved in immorality as that was their way of life and therefore every single person needed to be included in the punishment.

2. Even if there were a small minority of people who were not immoral, they were still responsible for their society and therefore deserved punishment. This answer will bring up issues of collective punishment (whether people are responsible for their fellow citizens in this context etc.) and is worth encouraging debate.

3. We are principally concerned with the effect that this nation may have on Jewish society. Therefore, the whole of their society must be destroyed in order to ensure that this immorality does not grow again in any area of their society that may be allowed to survive. The students may decide that it doesn't justify the destruction of a whole people, and of course, independent thought should be encouraged in students. In this case, it is for the teacher to decide how to deal with this sensitive and difficult issue within the ethos of the school.

### **Sources 3 - 4 13**

13. What do you think the difference between a *milchemet reshut* and *milchemet mitzvah* is, and do you think this makes a difference to the ethics of war? *Milchemet Harishut* is a war embarked on voluntarily in order to expand the borders of the Land of Israel. A *milchemet mitzvah* is a war that has been commanded by God. These include the *mitzvah* to destroy *Amalek*, the *mitzvah* to destroy the seven Canaanite nations and conquer/settle the Land of Israel, and any war entered into in self-defense. This should make a difference in the way you have to treat captives, and how much destruction you can or cannot inflict.

14. Source 4 lists the basic laws of humanity (The Seven *Mitzvot* of the Sons of Noah) that Rambam states must be an integral part of a peace treaty. If you had to list the basic laws of society, would they resemble this list? Are there any others that you would include? There is no right or wrong answer to this question, as long as students can justify their answers.

15. Why do you think Rambam places acceptance of the seven *mitzvot* of the sons of Noah as a fundamental condition of any peace treaty with Israel? This is a necessary conclusion. Anyone who does not commit to keeping these laws (i.e. basic ethical monotheism) is liable to death, and one cannot make a peace treaty with them. Therefore, any peace treaty must involve a commitment to these seven laws. 16. Why does the acceptance of these laws exempt us from the instruction to destroy these nations? (Use *Sefer Hachinuch's* rationale for the *mitzvah* in your answer). The *Sefer Hachinuch* gave two reasons for their destruction – punishment and the removal of a potentially bad influence on the Jewish people. Both of these reasons become irrelevant if the nations commit to ethical monotheism. They no longer deserve punishment, and they are no longer a risk to the moral fiber of Jewish society and therefore do not need to be destroyed.

17. What do you think one must do if the enemy does not want to commit to ethical monotheism (i.e. these seven laws)? One has no choice but to destroy them, which according to the Rambam, *Sefer Hachinuch*, and the Torah itself is justified as a punishment. It is important to remember that anyone and any nation always has the chance to repent and commit to morality, and this in fact is exactly what the peace treaty is. Should they decide not to make this choice then they must be destroyed. The parallels with other 'religious wars' involving religious extremism (such as the Crusades, Jihad, etc.) are inviting to discuss. This is a very difficult part of biblical ethics and will no doubt spark much discussion. This should be encouraged.

18. Why is it necessary to subjugate an enemy if they have signed a peace treaty and agree to be ethical monotheists? This is the same answer as question 5 in source 1. 8