

War and Peace in Judaism Worksheet: War within Judaism

Sources:

Source 1: [Devarim 20](#)

כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אֹיְבֶיךָ וְרָאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב עִם רַב מִמֶּךָ לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ הַמַּעֲלֶךְ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
וְהָיָה כִּקְרַבְכֶם אֶל הַמִּלְחָמָה וּנְגַשׁ הַכֹּהֵן וְדַבֵּר אֶל הָעָם:
וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם קִרְבִּים הַיּוֹם לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אֹיְבֵיכֶם אֵל יְרֵךְ לְבַבְכֶם אֵל תִּירָאוּ וְאֵל תַּחְפְּזוּ וְאֵל תַּעֲרָצוּ:
מִפְּנֵיהֶם:
כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הֵהָלֵךְ עִמָּכֶם לְהִלָּחֵם לָכֶם עִם אֹיְבֵיכֶם לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם:
וְדַבְרוּ הַשְּׁטָרִים אֶל הָעָם לֵאמֹר מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בַּיִת חֲדָשׁ וְלֹא חֲנָכוּ יֵלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פֶּן יָמוּת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ
אֲחֵר יִחַנְּכֶנּוּ:
וְמִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נָטַע כָּרֶם וְלֹא חָלְלוּ יֵלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פֶּן יָמוּת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר יִחַלְלֶנּוּ:
וְמִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אָרַשׁ אִשָּׁה וְלֹא לָקַחָהּ יֵלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פֶּן יָמוּת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר יִקְחֶנָּה:
וַיֹּסְפוּ הַשְּׁטָרִים לְדַבֵּר אֶל הָעָם וְאָמְרוּ מִי הָאִישׁ הַיָּרֵא וְרֵךְ הַלֵּבב יֵלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יִמַּס אֶת לִבְבּוֹ אֲחִיו כְּלָבָבוּ:
וְהָיָה כָּכֹלֶת הַשְּׁטָרִים לְדַבֵּר אֶל הָעָם וּפְקֻדוֹ שָׂרֵי צְבָאוֹת בְּרֹאשׁ הָעָם:
כִּי תִקְרַב אֶל עִיר לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ וְקִרְאתָ אֲלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם:
וְהָיָה אִם שָׁלוֹם תַּעֲנֶנּוּ וּפְתַחְתָּהּ לָךְ וְהָיָה כָּל הָעָם הַנִּמְצָא בָּהּ יִהְיוּ לְךָ לְמַס וְעַבְדוּךָ:
וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁלִים עִמָּךְ וְעִשְׂתָּהּ עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה וְצִרְתָּ עָלֶיהָ:
וַיִּתְּנָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְיָדְךָ וְהִכִּיתָ אֶת כָּל זְכוֹרָהּ לְפִי חֶרֶב:
רַק הַנְּשִׂיִם וְהַטַּף וְהַבְּהֵמָה וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּעִיר כָּל שְׁלָלָהּ תִּבְדֹּךְ לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת שְׁלַל אֹיְבֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָךְ:
כֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל הָעָרִים הַרְחֻקוֹת מִמֶּךָ מֵאֲדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא מַעֲרִי הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה הַנֵּה:
רַק מַעֲרֵי הָעַמִּים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ נַחֲלָה לֹא תַחֲיֶיהָ כָּל נַשְׂמָה:
כִּי הַחֲרָם תַּחֲרִימֶם הַחַיִּי וְהָאָמִרִי הַכֹּנְעָנִי וְהַפְּרָזִי הַחַיִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִלְמְדוּ אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּכֹל תּוֹעֲבֹתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְחִטָּאתֶם לֵה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: {ס}
כִּי תִצְוֶה אֶל עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא תִשְׁחִית אֶת עֵצָהּ לְנִדְחֵי עַלְיוֹ גְרָזָן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֶתּוֹ לֹא
תִּכְרַת כִּי הָאָדָם עִץ הַשֵּׁדָה לְבָא מִפְּנֵיךָ בְּמִצּוֹר:
רַק עֵץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְעֶה כִּי לֹא עֵץ מֵאֲכָל הוּא אֶתּוֹ תִשְׁחִית וְכִרְתָּ וּבְנִיתָ מִצּוֹר עַל הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה עַד
רִדְתָּה:

When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses, chariots, and a people more numerous than you, be not afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

And it shall be when you have come near the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people

And shall say to them, Hear O Israel, you approach this day to battle against your enemies; let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, nor be you terrified because of them;

For the Lord your God is he who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

And the officers shall speak to the people, saying, What man is there who has built a new house, and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicates it.

And what man is he who has planted a vineyard, and has not yet eaten of it? Let him also go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eats of it.

And what man is there who has betrothed a wife, and has not taken her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man takes her.

And the officers shall speak further to the people, and they shall say, What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest his brother's heart faint as well as his heart.

And it shall be when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall appoint captains of the armies to lead the people.

When you come near a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace to it.

And it shall be, if it gives you answer of peace, and opens to you, then it shall be, that all the people that are found in it shall be tributaries to you, and they shall serve you.

And if it will make no peace with you, but will make war against you, then you shall besiege it; And when the Lord your God has delivered it into your hands, you shall strike its every male with the edge of the sword;

But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, all the plunder from it, shall you take for yourself; and you shall eat the plunder of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you.

Thus shall you do to all the cities which are very far off from you, which are not of the cities of these nations.

But of the cities of these people, which the Lord your God does give you for an inheritance, you shall not keep alive anything that breathes;

But you shall completely destroy them: the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord your God has commanded you;

That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done to their gods; so should you sin against the Lord your God.

When you shall besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by forcing an ax against them; for you may eat of them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man that it should be besieged by you?

Only the trees which you know are not trees for food, you shall destroy and cut them down; and you shall build siege works against the city that makes war with you until it is subdued.

Source 2: Sefer HaChinuch – 425 (Parashat Va'Etchanan)

Mitzvah 425: The Mitzvah of Killing out the Seven Nations - To put to death the Seven Nations that held our land before we captured it from them – these being the Canaanite, Amorite, Hittite, Hivite, Perizzite, and Jebusite – and to eliminate them wherever we may find them. For it is stated about them “you shall utterly destroy them” (Devarim 7:2), and the Mitzvah was reiterated in Sidrat Shoftim since it is stated there “for you shall utterly destroy them” (Devarim 20:17). At

the root of the precept lies the reason that these Seven Nations are the ones that started to perform all kinds of idol worship, and every abomination to the Lord, which He detests. Therefore, since they were a main (root) element of idolatry and its first foundation, we were commanded to extirpate and eliminate them from under heaven, so that they not be remembered or recalled in the land of the living. And in this precept of ours, a benefit will result for us: we will eliminate their remembrance from the world, and thus we will not learn from their actions. It is, moreover, for us to learn a moral lesson from this – that we should not turn towards idol worship. For when we pursue every man in this evil family [of nations] to kill him because they occupied themselves with idolatry, the thought will not arise in the heart of any man to do acts like theirs under any circumstances.

Source 3: [Rambam Laws of Kings 6:1](#)

War, whether a *milchemet hareshut* (voluntary war) or *milchemet mitzvah* (Divinely commanded war), should not be waged against anybody until he is offered the opportunity of peace as it says “when you approach a city to wage war against it, you must propose a peaceful settlement” (*Devarim* 20:10). 2. If [the enemy] accepts the offer of peace and commits itself to the fulfillment of the Seven *Mitzvot* that were commanded to Noah’s descendants, none of them should be killed. Rather they should be subjugated as it says: “They shall be your subjects and serve you” (*Devarim* 20:11).

Source 4: [Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 56a](#)

Our Rabbis have taught: Seven Mitzvot have been commanded to the ‘sons of Noach’ and they are: 1) Establishing Law Courts (to uphold other laws); 2) Blaspheming; 3) Idol Worship; 4) Sexual Immorality; 5) Murder; 6) Theft; 7) Eating a limb from a live animal (cruelty to animals)

Questions:

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?

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?

3. Which categories of people are exempt from conscription? Why do you think this is?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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”. What message do you think this has for us?
