

Resources for Discussing War in the World

When violent skirmishes or war breaks out in the world, people observing from the outside can feel anxious, afraid, or overwhelmed by the situation. Speaking about the situation can help people begin to work through their different emotions. These texts and support questions are meant to provide openings to discuss what is happening in the world.

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:16	ויקרא יט:טז
Do not go as a talebearer among your people; do not stand on the blood of your neighbor. I am YHVH.	לֹא תִלְוֶה רֵעִיךָ בְּעֵמֶיךָ לֹא תִעָמֵד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְיָ:

- According to this verse from the Torah, what responsibility do people have when they see someone in trouble?
- In what situations do you think this applies?

Rashi on Vayikra 19:16	רש"י על ויקרא יט:טז
"Do not stand on the blood of your neighbor"—To see [that he is in a situation in which he could die] and you can save him, for example he is drowning in a river or an animal or bandit comes upon him.	לֹא תִעָמֵד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ. לְרֵאוֹת בְּמִיתָתוֹ וְאַתָּה יָכוֹל לְהַצִּילוֹ, כְּגוֹן טוֹבֵעַ בְּנֶהַר וְחִיָּה אוֹ לִיֶּסְטִים בְּאִים עָלָיו

- Rashi interprets the verse from the Torah in a particular way. According to Rashi what is the type of situation to which the Torah is referring?
- Who do you think qualifies as a neighbor in this case? Is it someone who lives near you? Someone who is part of your community? Anyone who you see in trouble?
- Do you think this should apply to governments and countries as well as to individuals? When should one nation be responsible for helping another nation?
- How do you feel when you see or hear about someone in danger?
- What ways can you think of to help someone even if you cannot take them out of physical danger?

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Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Sanhedrin</i> 105a	מסכת סנהדרין קה.
<p>A parable about two dogs that were with the flock and were hostile to each other. A wolf came upon one [of the dogs]. The other dog said, "If I do not help him today, [the wolf] will kill him and tomorrow [the wolf] will come upon me. The two [dogs] went and killed the wolf.</p>	<p>משל לשני כלבים שהיו בעדר והיו צהובין זה לזה בא זאב על האחד אמר האחד אם איני עוזרו היום הורג אותו ולמחר בא עלי הלכו שניהם והרגו הזאב אמר רב פפא היינו דאמרי אינשי כרכושתא ושונרא עבדו הלולא מתרבא דביש גדא</p>

- Why does the second dog come to the aid of the first dog? What is he concerned will happen?
- What do you think the dogs represent? What message do you think the Talmud is trying to teach about real-life situations?
- What do you think this parable teaches about our responsibility to other nations?

Michael Broyde, "Just Wars, Just Battles and Just Conduct in Jewish Law: Jewish Law Is Not a Suicide Pact!," page 30

When one reviews the rules found within Jewish law for waging war, one grasps a crucial reality of Jewish military ethics. The moral license that "war" grants a person or a country varies from situation to situation and event to event. The Jewish tradition treats different permissible wars differently. The battle for vital economic need carries with it much less of a moral license than the war waged to prevent an aggressive enemy from conquering an innocent nation. Jewish law recognized that some wars are simply completely immoral, some wars are morally permissible but grant a very limited license to kill, and some wars are a basic battle for good with an enemy that is evil. Each of these situations comes with a different moral response and a different right to wage war. In sum, it is crucially important to examine the justice of every cause. However, violence in the service of justice is not to be abhorred within the Jewish tradition.

- How can engaging in war be considered moral? What might be considered a just war?
- How can one tell the difference between a just war and an unjust war?
- How much do you think one must try to deal in a non-violent way with an enemy that is evil?

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Mishlei (Proverbs) 13:21	משלי יג:כא
Evil pursues sinners. The righteous are rewarded.	חַטָּאִים תִּרְדֹּף רָעָה וְאֶת־צַדִּיקִים יִשְׁלֵם־טוֹב:

- What message about the world does this verse convey?
- Do you believe what this verse says? What timeframe do you think is indicated?
- How does this verse affect your outlook on the world?

Tehillim (Psalms) 121:1-2	תהילים קכא:א-ב
¹ A Song of Ascents I will lift my eyes up to the mountains. From where will my help come? ² My help comes from YHVH, the Maker of the Heavens and the Earth	^א שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יָבֵא עֲזָרִי: ^ב עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְיָ עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

- What does the author try to convey in each verse? How does the second verse answer the first verse?
- Where do you find comfort and strength in times of great difficulty?

Excerpt from the Prayer for Israeli Soldiers	מי שברך לחיילי צה"ל
May the one that blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bless the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces... May the Holy Blessed One protect and rescue our soldiers from all trouble and distress and from all affliction and illness and may he send blessing and success in all the work for their hands...	מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲבִרְהֵם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב הוּא יִבְרַךְ אֶת חַיְלֵי צָבָא הַגָּנָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל... הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִשְׁמַר וְיִצִּיל אֶת חַיְלֵינוּ מִכָּל צָרָה וְצוּקָה וּמִכָּל נֹגַע וּמַחֲלָה וְיִשְׁלַח בְּרָכָה וְהַצְלָחָה בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם...

- This prayer is said in synagogues around the world. How can prayer help people who are fighting in a war far away?
- How can such a prayer help the people who are praying from far away?

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Isaiah 2:4	ישעיהו ב:ד
<p>He will judge among the nations and arbitrate for many peoples, and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift sword against nation, and they will not study war anymore.</p>	<p>וְשָׁפַט בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְהוֹכִיחַ לְעַמִּים רַבִּים וְכָתְתוּ חַרְבוֹתָם לְאֵתִים וְחַנְיֹתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמָרוֹת לֹא יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל־גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה:</p>

- This verse presents a vision for a world in which there will be no more war. Do you think this is a realistic vision?
- What can be done to help achieve this vision?
- Can you envision a time when it might be necessary to go to war in order to prevent war?
- How can civilians help achieve the vision of this verse?