

Jewish Views on War and Peace

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Biblical Views

- Hate evil and love good. (Amos 5:15) שנאו רע ואהבו טוב.

Peace

- Seek peace and pursue it. (Psalm 13:15) בקש שלום ורדפהו.
- I will grant peace in the Land and when you lie down no one will make you afraid. ונתתי שלום בארץ ושכבתם ואין מחריד. (Lev. 26:6)
- May Adonai bless you and keep you. May Adonai's face shine graciously upon you. May Adonai's face greet you and grant you peace. יברכך יי וישמרך. יאר יי פניו אליך ויחנך. ישא יי פניו אליך וישם לך שלום. (Numbers 6)
- When you approach a city to wage war, call out first in peace. כי תקרב אל עיר להלכם עליה וקראת אליה לשלום. (Deut. 20:10)
- Do not let me be like wicked evildoers who speak peace with their neighbors but harbor evil in their hearts. אל תמשכני עם רשעים ועם פעלי און דברי שלום עם רעיהם ורעה בלבבם. (Psalm 28:3)
- Adonai will grant might to his people; Adonai will bless his people with peace. יי עז לעמו יתן יי יברך את עמו בשלום. (Psalm 29:11 [and elsewhere])
- Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "Let all who love you find tranquility." שאלו שלום ירושלים ישליו אהביך. (Psalm 122:6)
- May you see your children's children, and may peace be upon Israel. וראה בנים לבניך שלום על ישראל. (Psalm 128:6)

- There is a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. עת לאהב
ועת לשנא עת מלחמה ועת שלום. (Eccl. 3:8)
- Forming light and creating darkness, making peace and creating evil, I am Adonai who makes
all of these. (Isaiah 45:7) יוצר אור ובורא חשך עשה שלום ובורא רע אני יי עשה כל אלה.
- I cried out, "Adonai, God! You have deceived this people and Jerusalem when you promised
peace, for the sword has wounded mortally." ואמר אהה יי אלהים אכן השא השאת לעם הזה
ולירושלים לאמר שלום יהיה לכם ונגעה חרב עד נפש. (Jeremiah 4:10)
- [God says:] "I will reveal to them a crown of peace and truth." וגליתי להם עתרת שלום ואמת.
(Jeremiah 33:6)

War

- Adonai will be at war with Amalek in every generation. מלחמה ליי בעמלק מדר דר.
(Exodus 17:16)
- [When going off to war, say:] If there is anyone who has built a house but not yet dedicated it,
let him return to his house, lest he die in war and someone else dedicate it. מי האיש אשר
בנה בית חדש ולא חנכו ילך וישב לביתו פן ימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יחנכנו. (Deut. 20:5)
- If there is anyone who has planted a vineyard and not yet harvested it, let him return to his
house, lest he die in war and someone else harvest it. ומי האיש אשר נטע כרם ולא חללו ילך
וישב לביתו פן ימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יחללנו. (Deut. 20:6)
- If there is anyone who has become engaged to a wife but not yet married her, let him return to
his house, lest he die in war and someone else marry her. ומי האיש אשר ארש אשה ולא לקחה
ילך וישב לביתו פן ימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יקחנה. (Deut. 20:7)
- Blessed is Adonai, my Rock, who instructs my hands for battle and my fingers for war. ברוך
יי צורי המלמד ידי לקרב אצבעותי למלחמה. (Psalm 144:1)
- He shall judge among nations and arbitrate among peoples and they shall beat their swords
into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against
nation and they shall never again study war. ושפט בין הגוים והוכיח לעמים רבים וכתתו חרבותם
לאתים וחניתותיהם למזמרות לא ישא גוי אל גוי חרב ולא ילמדו עוד מלחמה. (Isaiah 2:4)
- The pain! The pain! How I suffer! The walls of my heart! My heart is sick. I cannot keep
quiet, for I have heard the blaring trumpet, my soul the call for war. מעי מעי אחולה קירות
לבי המה לי לבי לא אחריש כי קול שופר שמעתי נפשי תרועת מלחמה. (Jeremiah 4:19)

- [God] will banish the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of war will be banished, and He will speak of peace to the nations. והכרתיו רכב מאפרים וסוס מירושלים ונכרתה קשת מלחמה ודבר שלום לגוים. (Zechariah 9:9)

Classical Views

- **Leviticus Rabba.** So great is peace that all of the blessings are included in it. [...] So great is peace that all of the commandments are written in it. [...] When it says, “seek peace and pursue it”— Seek peace where you live, and pursue it in other places. [...] So great is peace that it is in all journeys. [...] So great is peace that Scripture speaks in fabrication in the Torah to impose peace between Abraham and Sarah. [...] So great is peace that Scripture speaks in fabrication in the Prophets to impose peace between between a man and his wife. So great is peace, that even on high, where there is no jealousy or hatred or competition or fighting or rivalry or the evil eye, they need peace — for it says, “[God] makes peace on high” (Job 25:2) — down below where we have all of these we need peace even more so. So great is peace that Scripture speaks in fabrication in the Torah to impose peace between Joseph and his brothers. [...] So great is peace that even in time of war we must start with peace — for it says, “When you approach a city etc.” [...] So great is peace that the Holy One of Blessing’s very name is “peace.” So great is peace that the Great Name written in holiness can be erased with water to impose peace between a man and his wife. So great is peace that when the Holy One of Blessing created his world he created peace between those on high and those down below, on the first day creating on high and down below — for it says, “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth” — on the second day, on high and down below [...] On the sixth day, God started to create a human, and He said, if I create him from on high then those on high will be greater than those down below by one creation, and if I create him from down below, then those down below will be greater by one creation, so what should I do? He created him from on high and from down below — for it says, “Adonai, God, created Man of dust from the earth” (down below) and “He blew the breath of life into his nose” (from on high). [...] So great is peace that every blessing and grace and favor that the Holy One of Blessing bestows on Israel is signed with peace: The Shema ends with “who spreads a shelter of peace”; the Amida, with “the one who makes peace”; the Priestly Blessing, with “grant you peace.” I have examples not only from prayers, but also from sacrifices.... I have examples not only from this world but from the world to come — “Like a river I will extend peace to her [to Zion, in the days to come -JMH]” (Isaiah 66:12). So great is peace that when the Anointed King [the Messiah -JMH] comes, he opens with nothing other than peace — for it says, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the legs of the herald, proclaiming peace [heralding goodness and proclaiming salvation].” (Isaiah 52:7).
- People can kill a **pursuer** to save their own life. (Talmud, Sanhedrin 74a-b)
- People must kill a pursuer trying to kill Jews, and perhaps a pursuer trying to kill anyone. (Shulchan Aruch 425)
- War is a category unto itself. (Talmud, Sotah 44b)
- The Talmud recognizes two types of war: **required**, and **authorized**. The Biblical wars were required wars, but beyond that tradition differs on the details. The Talmud (Sotah 44b) lists

pre-emptive strikes as required; Maimonides (Hilchot Melachim, 5:1) does not, but there he does list a war against an enemy that has attacked as required.

- “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 it 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.” (Ira Kasdan, www.jlaw.com)

Modern Views

- We extend our hand in peace and neighborliness to all of the neighboring states and to their peoples and call them to cooperation and mutual aide with the independent Jewish nation in its land. The State of Israel is prepared to contribute its share in a collective effort to promote the entire Middle East.
אנו מושיטים יד שלום ושכנות טובה לכל המדינות השכנות ועמיהן וקוראים להם לשיתוף פעולה ועזרה הדדית עם העם העברי העצמאי בארצו. מדינת ישראל מוכנה לתרום חלקה במעמץ משתף לקדמת המזרח התיכון כולו. (Israeli Declaration of Independence)
- If there were no longer any need for guns we would sing, “halleluyah.” If peace should come then you would see how the whole army sings, “halleluyah!”
אם ברובים כבר לא היה צורך היינו שרים אז הלליה. אם בא שלום, הייתם רואים, איך כל הצבא שר הלליה! (Popular Israeli song)
- Lift up your eyes in hope, not through gun sights. Sing a song of love, not of peace.
עיניים בתקוה, לא דרך כוונות. שירו שיר לאהבה ולא למלמות. (Popular Israeli song)
- “Grant us peace, thy most precious gift.” (UPB)