

## How Do You Start a War? You Proclaim Peace

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How do you wage war in a just way? What rules of engagement govern Jewish combat? The Torah gives us rules about what is referred to in Israel as “tohar haneshech”, i.e., “purity of arms” (Deuteronomy 20:1-20). In fact, the first maneuver in war is... to proclaim peace.

The early midrash collection on the book of Deuteronomy, Sifre D., explains how important peace is.

“When you come near a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace to it (Deuteronomy 20:10)”...

Great is peace, for even the dead require peace.

Great is peace, for even in their war Israel requires peace.

Great is peace, for even those who dwell on high require peace, as it is said, “He makes peace in His high places (Job 25:2).”

Great is peace for the priestly benediction concludes with it (Numbers 6:26).

And even Moses was a lover of peace, as it is said, “And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedmot unto Sihon the king of Heshbon with words of peace. (Deuteronomy 2:26).” (Sifre D., Piska 1990)

In other words, as Stephen Covey would say, begin with the end in mind. I believe, truly believe, that these ideas, expressed here (and elsewhere in rabbinic literature, e.g., Sifre Numb., 42, Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:12, Leviticus Rabbah 9:9) guide Israel’s military. They do not want conquest. They want peace.

### Discussion Questions

1. As the Holocaust slips beyond the realm of living memories, how can we remind those who would criticize Israel about the reasons the state of Israel was created? How can we explain the ethic of “never again,” i.e., never again will we be killed without defending ourselves? Is there a good, short, effective way to communicate this?
2. Everyone needs peace, according to our midrash: we need it, Israel needs it, even angels need it. Even the dead need it. Why would angels and the dead crave peace as much as we do?
3. These principles about how important peace is are actually gathered into one of the minor tractates of the Talmud, called Perek Hashalom. In a time of war, perhaps this would be a good tractate of Talmud to study. (BTW, it’s short and easy to learn.)

May all Israel, and all peoples, find the blessings of lasting peace. And may you have a happy Thanksgiving!