



Jews
in
Encounter
STUDENT'S BOOK



Funded by
the European Union

FACE2FACE

JEWS IN ENCOUNTER

STUDENT'S BOOK



EDUC8

© **EDUC8 (Educate to Build Resilience) Project, 2021**

<https://project-educ8.eu>

<https://reduc8.eu/>

Development of the Document:

Catholic University of Leuven Faculty of Philosophy

- Luc Anckaert, Professor
- Pierre Costalunga, Researcher

Beyond the Horizon ISSG

- Timucin Ibu, Developer and Graphic Designer

ISBN: 978-94-6444-915-0

Usage Rights and Permissions:

This work may be reproduced, shared or used in whole or partially, for non-commercial purposes as long as attribution to this work is given.

Third Party Content: The authors do not necessarily own each component of the content within this work. As such they do not warrant that the use of any third-party-owned individual component or part contained in the work will not infringe on the rights of those third parties. If you wish to re-use a component of the work, it is your responsibility to determine whether permission is needed for that re-use and to obtain permission from the copyright owner.

Photo credits: The photos and graphics used in the book are licensed under the terms of Creative Commons 0 ('CC0') by users on the source. CC0 is a licence where the users / creators have decided to waive all their copyright and related rights in their works to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Contact: Beyond the Horizon ISSG vzw (Project Coordinator), info@behorizon.org

Disclaimer: This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. The products developed within context of the EDUC8 project reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

CONTENT

06 INTRODUCTION

NAVIGATING THE BOOK

09 MODULE 1

ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER: DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

23 MODULE 2

ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS: TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

36 MODULE 3

ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

52 MODULE 4

WHEN ENCOUNTER BECOMES CONFLICT: JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

NAVIGATING THE BOOK

The world can seem full of terrible things. Terrorism, war, natural disasters, violence, poverty, ... It seems as if the world is in a constant struggle to better itself. The world is a diverse place, full of people with different views. In this world, violence and religion are often linked together. But how can religion show something good? How can religion show its rich tradition? In this book we try and let the Jewish tradition formulate its own answer to this question. We will journey together and discover more about Judaism.

How does the book work?

This textbook on **Judaism** is divided into four chapters, also called **deep modules**. Specifically, it covers the following four topics:

1. Encounter with the other: dealing with diversity
2. Encounter with sacred texts: texts of violence
3. Encounter with the environment: social and ecological issues
4. When encounter becomes conflict: just war and just peace



Figure 1
Video Clip

The first module on the encounter with the other examines the way in which 'the other' appears in the Jewish tradition. How does Judaism deal with diversity, and how is this related to the notions of justice and hospitality?

The second module focuses on how the Torah, the sacred texts of Jews, contains violent texts. How can we deal with these texts in a modern world? In what different ways can Jews interpret one and the same text?

A third module shifts the focus to the relationship between ecology and Judaism. This module focuses on how violence can happen against nature, but also in the name of nature. How can Jews tackle the issues raised by the climate crisis, while simultaneously avoiding polarization?

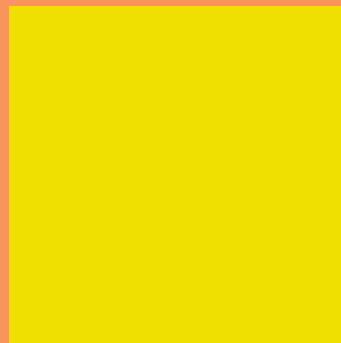
The fourth and final module highlights how Judaism positions itself in relation to war and peace. For example, how did the Talmudic rabbis interpret the stories of war in the Torah? And what can this teach us about war today?

Getting started

Each deep module starts with a **video clip**. This videoclip will show you friends going on all types of adventures. **Quiz questions** are asked throughout story. After watching the clip and answering the questions, you will start working through the **exercises in** this textbook.

Good luck!

1



ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER:
DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

MODULE ONE

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

1.1 THE STORY

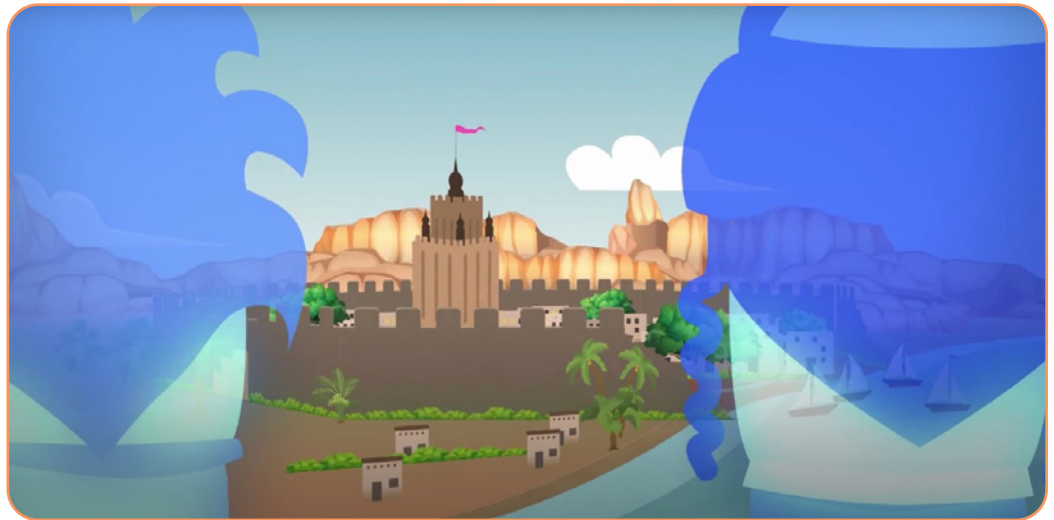


Figure 1.1
The Video Clip

After an apartment block burns down, the nearby school organizes a fundraiser to assist the victims. Aaron, a Jewish boy, refuses to offer help. The apartment block has many migrants. According to Aaron, they only moved to profit from a wealthier country, and are therefore undeserving of help.

Aaron's reason for not helping has to do with a peculiar Torah story: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The burning down of the apartment block, like the burning down of Sodom and Gomorrah, is a punishment from G-d. Levi, a fellow Jewish student, doubts Aaron's interpretation. Together they enter the story in search of its meaning.

1.2 THE DOWNFALL OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

1.2.1 SUMMARY GENESIS 18-19

The downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah takes place in **Genesis 19**, but the story actually begins earlier: in **Genesis 18!** There we read how Abraham encounters three strangers, among whom G-d finds Himself. He springs to his feet, runs to them, bows, offers every comfort, washes their feet, and together with his wife Sarah, prepares a sumptuous meal. Abraham's reception is very generous.

The Lord has heard rumors that the sister cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are evil or unjust. Since G-d vouches for justice, He cannot be indifferent. The cities must be inspected. In the event that the cities are indeed found to be evil, they will be razed to the ground. Every inhabitant will then be killed. G-d decides to communicate this plan to Abraham.

Abraham points out a problem to G-d: His plan to punish the unjust is itself unjust. "Avraham approached and said, "Will you actually sweep away the righteous with the wicked? (Gen. 18:23) After Abraham's intervention, he and the Lord arrive to a new conclusion together: the city will be spared if ten innocent or righteous people can be found.

A little later, two angels arrive in the city of Sodom. There they are hospitably received by Lot, Abraham's nephew. The text suggests that the two angels were also guests of Abraham earlier. After their arrival there is a violent incident: the inhabitants of Sodom come knocking on Lot's door and demand the two guests. They act violently and clearly want to harm the angels.

The angels blind the inhabitants of Sodom so that they cannot find the house. Afterwards, they decide to destroy the city: the wickedness of Sodom is proven. Lot and his family are allowed to escape to a nearby city.

1.3. INTERPRETATION OF THE STORY

1.3.1 HOSPITALITY - STANDING UP FOR THE OTHER

ASSIGNMENT. Read the two texts from Gen. 18 and 19 and answer the following questions.

Gen 18:

[1] Adonai appeared to Avraham by the oaks of Mamre as he sat at the entrance to the tent during the heat of the day. [2] He raised his eyes and looked, and there in front of him stood three men. On seeing them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, prostrated himself on the ground, [3] and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, please don't leave your servant. [4] Please let me send for some water, so that you can wash your feet; then rest under the tree, [5] and I will bring a piece of bread. Now that you have come to your servant, refresh yourselves before going on." "Very well," they replied, "do what you have said."

[6] Avraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, three measures of the best flour! Knead it and make cakes." [7] Avraham ran to the herd, took a good, tender calf and gave it to the servant, who hurried to prepare it. [8] Then he took curds, milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it all before the men; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

Gen 19:


[1] The two angels came to S'dom that evening, when Lot was sitting at the gate of S'dom. Lot saw them, got up to greet them and prostrated himself on the ground. [2] He said, "Here now, my lords, please come over to your servant's house. Spend the night, wash your feet, get up early, and go on your way." "No," they answered, "we'll stay in the square." [3] But he kept pressing them; so they went home with him; and he made them a meal, baking matzah for their supper, which they ate.

- Compare how Lot and Abraham treat strangers. Are there differences?

- In what ways are you and your family hospitable? What customs do you have for receiving guests?

- Do you think there is still a duty today to be hospitable to strangers? Why yes/no?

- Do you think there are people today who are in need of hospitality? Why yes/no?

 The story provides an important lesson in hospitality. Abraham and Lot welcome absolute strangers into their midst, and stand up for their protection. Lot even resists the inhabitants of Sodom. **This is not the kind of hospitality that receives friends for dinner, but the one that stands up for the stranger.** Lot and his family are rewarded for this kind of hospitality and are allowed to escape the destruction of Sodom.

1.3.2 ABRAHAM'S CHUTZPAH

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text from Gen. 18 with the conversation between Abraham and the Lord. Afterwards, answer the questions

20] Adonai said, "The outcry against S'dom and 'Amora is so great and their sin so serious [21] that I will now go down and see whether their deeds warrant the outcry that has reached me; if not, I will know." [22] The men turned away from there and went toward S'dom, but Avraham remained standing before Adonai. [23] Avraham approached and said, "Will you actually sweep away the righteous with the wicked? [24] Maybe there are fifty righteous people in the city; will you actually sweep the place away, and not forgive it for the sake of the fifty righteous who are there? [25] Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous along with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike! Far be it from you! Shouldn't the judge of all the earth do what is just?" [26] Adonai said, "If I find in S'dom fifty who are righteous, then I will forgive the whole place for their sake."


[27] Avraham answered, "Here now, I, who am but dust and ashes, have taken it upon myself to speak to Adonai. [28] What if there are five less than fifty righteous?" He said, "I won't destroy it if I find forty-five there."

[29] He spoke to him yet again: "What if forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of the forty I won't do it."

[30] He said, "I hope Adonai won't be angry if I speak. What if thirty are found there?" He said, "I won't do it if I find thirty there."

[31] He said, "Here now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to Adonai. What if twenty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of the twenty I won't destroy it."

[32] He said, "I hope Adonai won't be angry if I speak just once more. What if ten are found there?" He said, "For the sake of the ten I won't destroy it." [33] Adonai went on his way as soon as he had finished speaking to Avraham, and Avraham returned to his place.

 Abraham critically questions G-d's plan. His intervention fits within the Jewish tradition of the "chutzpah", the critical frankness that cries out to G-d, against G-d, and in the name of G-d's creation and the covenant. It involves a kind of candid sincerity with which a Jew, as a full partner of the covenant, enters into discussion with the other partner, G-d.

- How would you describe Abraham's attitude? Arrogant, humble, ...?



- Describe Abraham's plea in your own words.



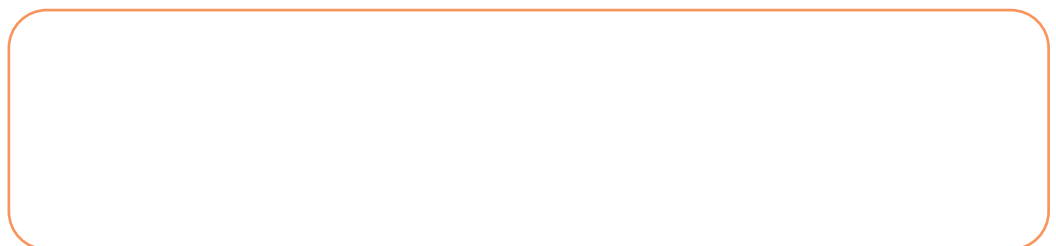
- Right or wrong. Abraham proposes a compromise to G-d.



- Abraham reminds G-d that a plan to punish the guilty can also punish the innocent. Can you associate this with contemporary events or phenomena?



- G-d changes his plan through Abraham's intervention. Do you change your mind easily?

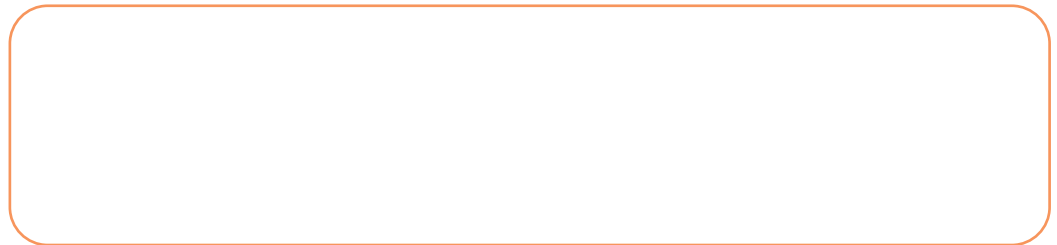


1.3.3 OUR ENVIRONMENT

Lot's reception is less extensive than Abraham's. Moreover, Lot offers his daughters to the violent inhabitants of Sodom. His aim is to protect his two guests, but this passage remains shocking to contemporary readers. Some commentators therefore believe that Lot is not as benign a character as initially appears. The difference may have to do with their location. Lot lives in the city of Sodom; Abraham lives near Mamre, in a tent in the wilderness. The story can teach us something about the interaction between humans and their environment. **The environment in which we find ourselves affects our behavior.**

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the following questions about the relationship between our environment and our behavior.

- Do you think you sometimes find yourself in a culture (environment) that does not protect the poor, weak, or vulnerable? Why do/don't you?



- To what extent do environmental factors determine our behavior? In other words, which is more important: personality or environmental factors?



1.3.4 THE EVIL OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

After the incident at Lot's home - where the villagers come looking for the two angels - G-d decides to destroy the city. Ten righteous people could not be found. But the story is not entirely clear about what the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are. There are several passages in the Tanakh that mention the sister cities and their evilness. These passages may give an indication of what the sister cities are ultimately punished for.

ASSIGNMENT. Read the three passages and then answer the questions.

1.3.5 EZEKIEL 16: 49-50

[49] The crimes of your sister S'dom were pride and gluttony; she and her daughters were careless and complacent, so that they did nothing to help the poor and needy.

[50] They were arrogant and committed disgusting acts before me; so that when I saw it, I swept them away.

1.3.6 JEREMIAH 23:14

But in the prophets of Yerushalayim
I have seen a horrible thing —
they commit adultery, live in lies,
so encouraging evildoers
that none returns from his sin.
For me they have all become like S'dom,
its inhabitants like 'Amora."

1.3.7 AMOS 4, 11

[1] "Listen, you [lovely] cows of Bashan,
who live on Mount Shomron,
who oppress the poor and grind down the needy,
who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink'

[11] "I overthrew some of you,
as when God overthrew S'dom and 'Amora;
you were like a burning stick snatched from the fire;
still you haven't returned to me," says Adonai.

- Try to summarize the three passages as precisely as possible. How do they describe the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah?

- Do you think the things the three passages describe still occur today?

- What could be another contemporary sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?

1.4 GLOSSARY

Chutzpah

The word *chutzpah* is difficult to define. The meaning of this noun lies somewhere between the more extreme ‘insolence’ and the more moderate ‘impropriety’. Thus, someone with *chutzpah* is unafraid to do rather ‘daring’ things. This is also how we can describe Abraham’s intervention.

The word comes from Yiddish, and the Yiddish word in turn comes from Hebrew. In Yiddish it tends to have a negative connotation, such as ‘rudeness’ or ‘arrogance’, but this is not necessarily the case in the other languages! Within Judaism, *chutzpah* has the meaning of a critical but sincere discussion between the two partners of the covenant: G-d and a Jew. The Jew cries out to G-d, against G-d, and in the name of G-d’s creation and covenant.

In addition to Abraham, Moses also forms an example. In Exodus 32:11, Moses is at Mount Sinai when G-d informs him that the Jewish people at the bottom of the mountain are worshipping a calf. This goes against one of the Ten Commandments, so the Lord wants to destroy them all and start over with Moses. Moses thereupon enters into a discussion with the Lord, just as Abraham does in Genesis 18, and the Lord deviates from His plan. So Moses and Abraham both got *chutzpah!*

Righteous/unrighteous

Righteousness has several meanings. First, justice is a legal concept. Whatever is in accordance with the law is just. Second, justice is also a moral concept. To act justly is to act ‘rightly’, in accordance with what is ‘good’ or ‘correct’. Justice also takes practice: no one naturally does the right or good thing all the time. We encounter this idea often in the Tanakh!



Figure 1.2
Source: © Sergign /
Adobe Stock

1.5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT CLASSROOM DAY

The scene opens on a classroom. The final school bell rings. The kids start to pack up.

Teacher: Before you go home, there is one more thing. As you know, there was a fire in one of our city's apartment complexes. The school has decided to organize a donation campaign to help out the poor families that lived there. Try bringing in some old clothes and other things you can miss for next Monday! I'm sure those families will appreciate that very much!

Aaron (mumbles to himself): I'm sure they would.

The kids take their school bags and walk outside.

2 INT COMPUTER DAY

We see Aaron sitting in front of his computer. He gets a videocall from his friend Levi. He accepts it and a video-screen call opens up.

Levi: Hey! What's up?

Aaron: Hey, I'm good, what about you?

Levi: I'm good, actually. Have you already found some stuff to donate?

Aaron: Nope, and I'm not really planning on donating anything.

Levi: Why not? You know they lost their house and a lot of their stuff, right?

Aaron: It's not really their house, though, is it? We just let them live there free of charge.

Aaron: They're not in actual need, Aaron. I heard my parents talking about them the other day. The people that lived in those apartments are economic immigrants. They're here for cheap housing and a bigger paycheck, without contributing anything themselves. It's almost like stealing. And now I even have to give them my stuff too? I don't think so. Why don't they just go back to where they came from?

Levi: Wow man, don't you think that's a bit harsh? If people are in need, it's our duty as Jews to be just and help them.

Aaron: Not necessarily. And I don't need to talk to them personally to know them. You can see how they are on the street, they're just mean people. There's a story in the Torah that's literally about this. And in that case Hashem destroyed the bad people. It's the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Levi: I know that one! From the Book of Genesis, right? But doesn't it -

Suddenly a mysterious message appears on screen. It says: SODOM AND GOMORRA: A STORY. There's an accept and decline option. Aaron and Levi are both surprised.

Levi: What's that?

Aaron: I don't know... It says it's an invitation for the story of Sodom and Gomorrah... We were just talking about this! That's spooky...

Levi: Computers are really advanced nowadays. Do you think we should accept it?

Aaron: Sure, why not?

Aaron and Levi both click on 'accept'. The screen explodes into a kaleidoscope. A voice-over welcomes them to the story. Both of them are rather surprised.

Voice-over: Dear virtual travelers! Welcome to the Tanakh: internet edition! You have chosen the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Strap in!

Aaron: But how did it know -

3 EXT SODOM EVENING

The screen abruptly transforms into a virtual reality. The scene opens up on the city of Sodom. We see an older looking man sitting near the city gate.

Voice-over: Word came to Hashem that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were doing evil things. To see if this was true, He sent two angels. "That evening the two angels arrived in Sodom, while Lot was sitting near the city gate. When Lot saw them, he got up, bowed down low, and said, "Gentlemen, I am your servant. Please come to my home."

Levi: That's Lot, Abraham's nephew!

4 EXT LOT'S HOUSE NIGHT

Lot, together with his wife and two daughters are sitting inside the house when a mob of angry men comes knocking on their door.

Aaron: I guess those are the people of Sodom...

Voice-over: The people of Sodom yelled: "Where are you visitors? Send them out, so we can know them!" Lot was so afraid that they might hurt his visitors, that he even offered his two daughters instead. "I'll bring them out, and you can do what you want with them. But don't harm these men. They are guests in my home." But the mob didn't care. "Don't get in our way," the crowd answered. "You're an outsider. What right do you have to order us around? We'll do worse things to you than we're going to do to them."

Levi: I didn't remember this story being so violent...

Voice-over: "But the two angels in the house reached out and pulled Lot safely inside. Then they struck everyone in the crowd blind, and none of them could even find the door. The two angels said to Lot, "The Lord has heard many terrible things about the people of Sodom, and he has sent us here to destroy the city. Take your family and leave." So Lot decided to escape to a small, nearby village.

5 EXT SODOM DAY

We see Lot and his family quickly leaving the city.

Voice-over: *The sun was coming up as Lot reached the town of Zoar, and the Lord sent sulfur and fire down like rain on Sodom and Gomorrah.*

During this narration, fire starts pouring down, until the entire city is engulfed in flames. After an explosion both Aaron and Levi are left looking at a black screen.

Aaron: *So, the story just concludes like that? I'm a bit confused now.*

Voice-over: *Can I ask you a question?*

Aaron: *Oh... Um, yeah, sure?*

Voice-over: *What exactly was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?*

Aaron: *I dunno... Unkindness? Violence?*

Voice-over: *Those are good suggestions. Different people have understood the story in different ways. Some think the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was inhospitality, or cruelty to keep foreigners away, or mistreatment of the poor, injustice, selfishness, Do any of these things sound familiar?*

Aaron: *Wait, what do you mean? Am I doing those things?*

The voice-over remains silent.

Aaron: *I don't know, maybe I need to rethink all of this... Who are you, if I may ask?*

Voice-over: *Oh, I'm just the story, asking you this question.*

The virtual-reality screen abruptly closes. Levi and Aaron return to their videocall.

Levi: *So, uhhhh...*

Aaron: *You don't need to say anything. Can we meet up? I think I have an idea.*

5 INT CLASS ROOM DAY

It's raining heavily outside. Aaron and Levi are sitting in class next to each other. At the front of the class room there are a lot of boxes stacked on top of each other.

Teacher: *Thank you everyone for donating so much stuff! And a special shout out to Aaron and Levi, who really pulled their weight on this one! I'm sure those poor families will appreciate this very much.*

Aaron (mumbling to himself, sincerely): *I hope they do.*

1.6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anckaert, Luc, Burggraave, Roger, Coillie, Geert. *Abraham en Oddyseus: over belofte, nostalgie en geweld*. Scherpenheuvel-Zichem: Uitgeverij Averbode, 2013.

Carden, Michael. "Genesis/Bereshit." In Guest, Deryn. *The Queer Bible Commentary*. Edited by Robert E Goss and Mona West. London: SCM Press, 2006. 21-60.

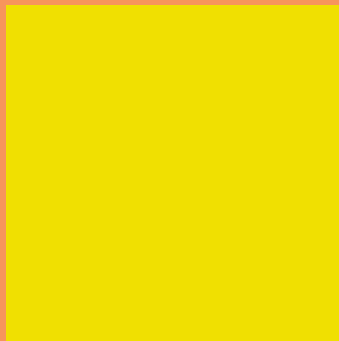
The Complete Jewish Bible. "Amos: 4:1, 11." Accessed March 9, 2021. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=amos+4%3A1-11&version=CJB>.

The Complete Jewish Bible. Translated by David H. Stern. Clarksville MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2017.

Levenson, Jon D. *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Loader, James Alfred. *A tale of two cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, early Jewish and early Christian traditions*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1990. 28.

2



ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS:
TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

MODULE TWO

ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS: TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

2.1 THE STORY



Figure 2.1
The Video Clip

The story shows a conflict between two students: Levi and Lindsay. Levi is a Jewish boy who moved with his family to a new city. He goes to a new school, but feels like people are looking at him strangely, and he only hangs out with other Jewish children. Lindsay, a classmate of Levi's, sees him standing at the bus stop, and speaks to him. They get into a discussion. Levi calls Lindsay 'Amalek' out of anger. In his defence he refers to a passage from the Tanakh. Suddenly, an old rabbi named Ezra appears. With the magical bus Bunim, he takes the children on their way to Ancient Israel, in search of the possible meaning of this Amalek story.

2.2 READING SECTION

2.2.1 EXODUS 17:8-16

ASSIGNMENT. Read the next two passages. Then answer the questions on the following page.

[8] Then 'Amalek came and fought with Isra'el at Refidim.

[9] Moshe said to Y'hoshua, "Choose men for us, go out, and fight with 'Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with God's staff in my hand."

[10] Y'hoshua did as Moshe had told him and fought with 'Amalek. Then Moshe, Aharon and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

[11] When Moshe raised his hand, Isra'el prevailed; but when he let it down, 'Amalek prevailed.

[12] However, Moshe's hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aharon and Hur held up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other; so that his hands stayed steady until sunset.

[13] Thus Y'hoshua defeated 'Amalek, putting their people to the sword.

[14] Adonai said to Moshe, "Write this in a book to be remembered, and tell it to Y'hoshua: I will completely blot out any memory of 'Amalek from under heaven."

[15] Moshe built an altar, called it Adonai Nissi [Adonai is my banner/miracle],

[16] and said, "Because their hand was against the throne of Yah, Adonai will fight 'Amalek generation after generation."

2.2.2 DEUTERONOMY 25:17-19

[17] "Remember what 'Amalek did to you on the road as you were coming out of Egypt, [18] how he met you by the road, attacked those in the rear, those who were exhausted and straggling behind when you were tired and weary. He did not fear God.

[19] Therefore, when Adonai your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies in the land Adonai your God is giving you as your inheritance to possess, you are to blot out all memory of 'Amalek from under heaven. Don't forget.

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the following questions.

What event are these two passages referring to?

Is this event told in exactly the same way, or is there a difference in information between the two passages?

If there is a difference in information: what is the difference between the Exodus passage and the Deuteronomy passage? (You can also answer this question the other way around).

What is the essence of these passages:

- Remembering (Amalek's act)
- Fighting (against Amalek)

Who will fight/eradicate the memory of Amalek:

- G-d
- The people of Israel

According to you: who or what is Amalek?

2.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE AMALEK PASSAGES

2.3.1 EX. 17:8-16

This passage can be found in the **middle section of the Book of Exodus**, the second book of the Torah. The Book of Exodus can be divided into two parts: Ex. 1-18 and Ex. 19-40. The first part is the tale about the journey out of Egypt. The second part tells about the Covenant at Mount Sinai. So Amalek attacks the Israeli people just before they make the Covenant with G-d on Mount Sinai!

The story of the journey out of Egypt is well known. The people of Israel have been slaves of the mighty Egypt for years, where 'the law of the strongest' prevails. Then G-d comes, and He helps the Jewish people escape. However, in the desert, the people of Israel get hungry and thirsty, and they start to question the decision to leave Egypt. They even question their liberator, G-d: "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Ex. 17:7) After this sentence, Amalek's attack occurs.

The place name **Rephidim** has a special meaning. The name consists of the verb 'rafah' and the noun 'jadim'. 'Rafah' means 'to become weak'. 'Jadim' means 'hands'. Rephidim thus means: 'the becoming weak of the hands'. This means that our courage can fail: our strength can, literally and figuratively, 'leave our hands'.



Figure 2.2
Amalek

2.3.2 DEUT. 25:17-19

In the end, G-d declares war on Amalek. G-d takes on **responsibility!** Moreover, it is not a one-off battle, but it will take place from generation to generation.

This passage can be found in the **middle section of the Book of Deuteronomy**, the fifth and last book of the Torah. The Book of Deuteronomy can be divided into three parts: Deut. 1-11, Deut. 12-26, and Deut. 27-34. The first part consists of Moses' opening words to a new generation of Israelites. The second part consists of a collection of laws on how to structure life in the Promised Land. The third part consists of Moses' last words and his passing. This means that the Amalek passage lies at the end of the middle part: the collection of laws!

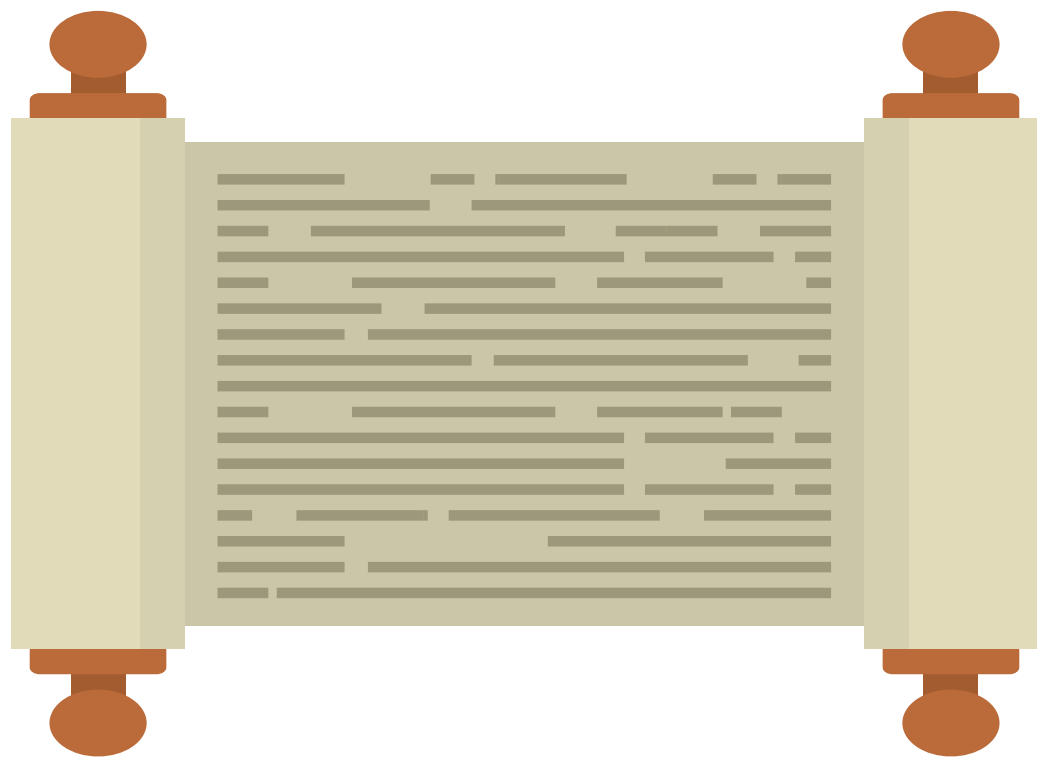


Figure 2.3
Image: Adobe Stock

The Deuteronomy Passage on Amalek gives us **new information** on the battle:

1. Amalek attacked while the Jewish people were **“by the road”**. The Torah means the path of liberation, leading from Egypt to the Promised Land. The people of Israel didn't have a home yet, lived in uncertain times, and were very vulnerable.
2. Amalek attacked **“in your rear”**. The 'rear' means the people at the back of the line, who consisted of the most vulnerable and weak. Amalek's attack was twice as cruel: among an already vulnerable people, he attacked the most vulnerable.

3. It says: **“He did not fear God”**. Translations here often refer to Amalek. The sentence thus means: Amalek did not fear G-d. But it’s not that simple! The Hebrew language leaves open the possibility that it could be Israel that did not fear G-d. The sentence is somewhat isolated, and grammatically it is possible.
4. We read that Israel also bears **responsibility**. It is a commandment or mitzvah: an obligation given by G-d. Israel has the obligation to wipe out the memory of Amalek. And at the same time, the attack must be remembered. “You must not forget it!”



Figure 4.4
Image: Video Clip

SUMMARY

1. Ex. 17:8-16 teaches us:
 - G-d will wipe out the remembrance of Amalek
 - G-d will wage war against Amalek from generation to generation
2. Deut. 25:17-19 teaches us:
 - Emphasis that the Jewish people were ‘by the road’: the road to liberation from confinement in Egypt to freedom in the land of Canaan.
 - Amalek attacked Israel at their weakest point
 - Israel must blot out the remembrance of Amalek
 - It is a mitzvah: a religious commandment

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the following questions with help from the explanation above.

Where do the passages in their book take place:

- Always in the middle section
- Always at the beginning
- Always at the very end

Who's to wipe out the memory of Amalek?

- The people of Israel
- G-d

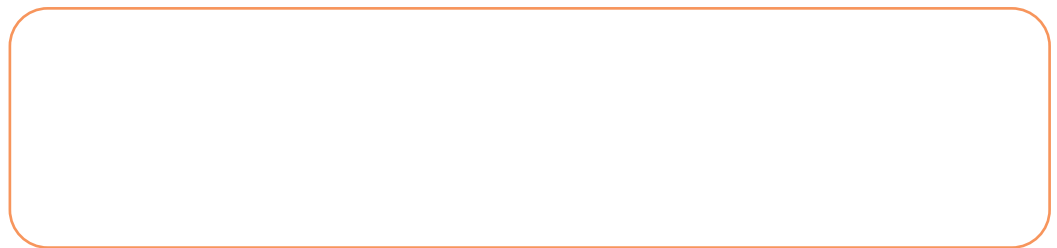
Who did not fear G-d?

Explain, using your own words, the meaning of the place name 'Rephidim'.

In the Deuteronomy passage, it says: "He did not fear God." This sentence can grammatically also refer to Israel. Why would Israel not fear G-d? What could this mean?

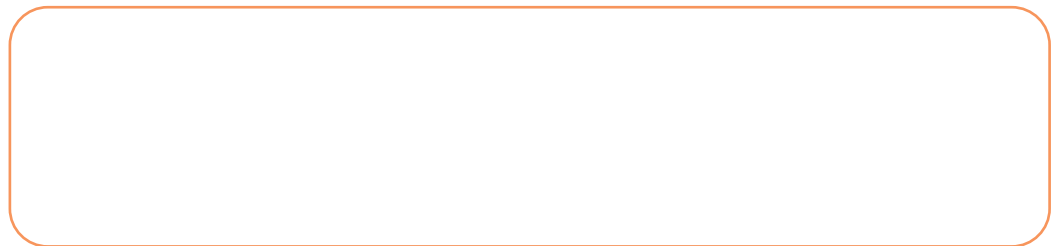


Amalek's attack was an act of war. Is the commandment to erase the memory of Amalek a matter of self-defense (to survive), or a matter of revenge?

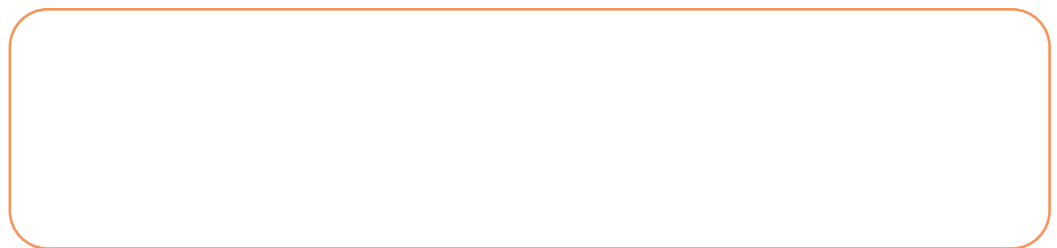


Read this sentence again: "Adonai will fight 'Amalek generation after generation." (Ex. 17:16)

Do you think "generation after generation" means that the battle is eternal, or do you think it refers to specific generations?



Do you think the commandment to blot out the remembrance of Amalek still applies today?



2.4 GLOSSARY

In this glossary you will find more information on certain terms.

Amalek

In Hebrew, the term 'Amalek' can refer to both a person, Amalek, and a people, the Amalekites. This module uses both meanings interchangeably.

Genocide

The term 'genocide' means the deliberate extermination of an ethnic group. International law regards this act as a horrific crime.

Canaan

According to the Hebrew Bible, Canaan is the land promised to the Jewish people. This area lies between the Mediterranean Sea in the West and the Jordan River in the East. This area is now made up of Lebanon, Israel, a part of Syria, and Jordan.



Photo: © Annie Spratt | Unsplash

2.5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT KITCHEN DAY

We see a father sitting at the kitchen table. It's morning. His son enters with his school bag and walks straight towards the door.

Father: Good morning! Leaving already?

Levi: Yeah. I don't have time for breakfast, sorry.

Father: I wanted to ask you about your new school. How's it going? It has been a week now... Have you made some friends in class yet?

Levi: Not really. But there are some other Jewish kids in school, though.

Father (confused): Why don't you hang out with your classmates?

Levi: Why would I? They always look at me, like I'm from outer space... Sorry, I really have to go now.

We see Levi quickly leaving the house.

2 EXT BUS STOP DAY

Levi arrives at the bus stop early. There is another kid, Lindsay. The other kid sees him.

Lindsay: Hi! I'm Lindsay. We're in the same class, right? Isn't your name Levi?

Levi: Now you care to talk to me?

Lindsay: What do you mean?

Levi: I've been here a week. No one talks to me. If you think I don't belong here, just say so.

Lindsay: Look, you're the one that is not talking to anyone. We see you Jewish kids grouping together all the time, what do you expect from us?

Levi: Ah forget it. You're just like Amalek.

Lindsay (confused): Who?

Levi: 'sighs' Of course you wouldn't know...Have you ever even opened the Bible?

Lindsay: euh... who has? But what are you saying?

Levi: Amalek hurt the people of Israel just when they moved out of Egypt and were vulnerable, like my family... We just moved here, too. But you wouldn't understand and why would you,... you don't even want us here.

Lindsay: Oh come on man...Comparing me to that Amak...

Ezra: You mean 'Amalek'.

Lindsay: Yes, exactly. Huh -

The kids turn around in surprise. They see an old, strange looking man, scratching his head.

Ezra: Shalom Aleichem!

Levi: Aleichem Shalom... I'm sorry... Who are you?

Ezra: My name is... Wait, hold on, I have a bad memory... Uhm... Oh, yes, it's Rabbi Ezra! I've come to help you! But tell me, what is all of this about Amalek?

Lindsay: He is calling everyone who is not Jewish that! It's ridiculous!

Ezra: Aha! Well, let's recall the passage... Wait, I've got a bad memory... Oh! Why don't we go and take the bus? I said I've come to help! Or I think I said that...

The kids look confused.

Lindsay: Uhm... How is a bus ride going to help us?

Ezra (laughing): aahhh! It'll take us of course! Come on!

The kids look confused. Ezra taps with his walking stick on the floor. Suddenly in a purple cloud of dust, a bus arrives at the bus stop.

Ezra: I couldn't think of a good name for this bus, so I called him Bunim! He can take us everywhere, so let's go to ancient Israel!

Levi: Wait... You mean back in time? But that's just a bus?

Ezra: That's exactly what I mean! Let's go!

Ezra taps his stick again, and suddenly they are all sitting in the bus. The bus starts driving.

We see the bus disappear in a purple fog.

3 EXT ANCIENT ISRAEL DAY

The bus stops in ancient Israel. Lindsay, Levi, and Rabbi

Ezra get out.

Levi: Where are we?

Ezra (proudly): Well, young ones, welcome to Ancient Israel, just like in the Bible! These are the plains of Moab. You wanted to look up what Moses exactly said, right? Bunim took us there! Now, it's kinda like a live concert!

Levi and Lindsay are bewildered.

Levi: So, we travelled through time??

Ezra: You got it! Look!

We see a long line of people, looking tired and wearisome, all moving towards one gathering place.

Ezra: Quickly, quickly. I don't want to miss the speech.

The company walks towards the front. They mix in with the rest of the people. No one seems to notice them. We then see Moses standing in front of a mountain. He is speaking passionately with his arms raised. One of his arms is holding a walking stick. He has long white hair and a long white beard.

Ezra: I wish I had that stick... Oh, listen! Moses is about to mention Amalek!

Moses: Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt — how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear.

Levi: See!

Lindsay looks disappointed.

Ezra: Hmm. You're a bit hasty. Why are you so sure Amalek is a person or group?

Levi: Because Moses just said so?

Ezra: Did he? Did you know that the Torah always has a deeper meaning? We can understand the writings in different ways.

Lindsay: How so?

Ezra: Well, Amalek first appeared right after the people were complaining about the lack of water, and they were doubting their decision to leave Egypt and follow God. For this reason, some Rabbi's think Amalek symbolizes our inner doubt. They think 'destroying the memory of Amalek' means destroying the part in us that doubts God and ourselves!

Levi: So, he's like a mirror to the bad parts of us?

Ezra: So, they think! But this 'bad part' can be many different things besides doubt, like 'not protecting the vulnerable', 'indifference', ... Amalek can symbolize all of these things!

Levi: But can't it be a person, too?

Ezra: Perhaps. You're thinking about your self-defence? But some Rabbi's think that if Amalek were a people, they only existed in ancient Israel. Then other Rabbi's think Amalek will only arrive in the future.

Levi: All of this about a couple of sentences...

Ezra: Look around. There are as many ways to understanding the Bible, as there are people standing here listening to Moses.

Ezra: All right, I think it's time for us to leave. [taps stick] You've got school, remember!

Levi: How do we get back?

Ezra: I don't know, but Bunim does!

Ezra, Levi and Lindsay walk towards the bus and get on. The bus drives to the present day bus stop.

4 EXT PRESENT DAY BUS STOP DAY

Levi and Lindsay get out.

Levi: Thank you, Rabbi Ezra –

Levi and Lindsay turn around and see that they are alone. The bus and Ezra are gone.

Lindsay: That was strange...

Levi: Yeah, it was... Look, I'm sorry. Calling you Amalek was weird, ... But it doesn't change the fact you are treating us like aliens.

Lindsay: It's okay, I understand. It must be hard to feel so unwelcome... We should have started talking much earlier.

2.5 REFERENCES

Ausloos, Hans. *Geweld, God, Bijbel*. Averbode: Uitgeverij Averbode, 2019.

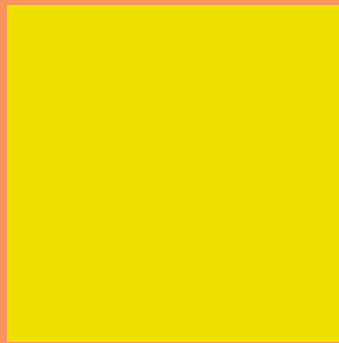
The Complete Jewish Bible. Translated by David H. Stern. Clarksville MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2017.

Harris, J. Michael. "DCT/SMU and the Commandment to Wipe out Amalek." *In Divine Command Ethics: Jewish and Christian perspective*, 134-150. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004. Taylor & Francis e-Library. <https://www.routledge.com/Divine-Command-Ethics-Jewish-and-Christian-Perspectives/Harris/p/book/9781138869769>

Rooze, Egbert. *Amalek: over geweld in het Oude Testament*. Kampen: Kok, 1997.

Sagi, Avi. "The Punishment of Amalek in Jewish Tradition: Coping with the Moral Problem." *The Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 3 (1994): 323-46. Accessed April 1, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/1509808.

3



ENCOUNTER WITH THE
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

MODULE THREE

ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 A STORY



Figure 3.1
The Video Clip

The video shows a conflict at school. Ariella is a Jewish girl who learns through the evening news about forest fires in Australia. To satisfy her hunger for more information, she sneaks to the computer at night. Her research reveals an avalanche of ecological crises, while the mysterious words *'bal tashchit'* reflects in her eyes.

At school she hears terrible news: the city council and the school board have decided to cut down a piece of the forest nearby. For years now there has been a shortage of parking spaces. Ariella decides to contest this decision, and she starts a protest movement. However, her movement soon starts dividing people up. What started out of noble intentions, threatens to escalate into full blown conflict. What is the role of the mysterious words *bal tashchit* in all this?

3.2 POLARIZATION AND CLIMATE PROTESTS

People have differing opinions on many subjects. A difference of opinion is inherent to communication and is not problematic in itself. Even in our society there are subjects on which (groups of) people have different opinions. It only becomes problematic when these different opinions and views lead to violence.

We can speak of polarization when differences between opposing groups keep increasing. The two groups face each other as **'opposites'**. An excessive polarization process can also be described as an **us vs. them** kind of thinking. In this way groups of people are placed diametrically opposite each other. Of course, polarization is not always negative. Differing, even conflicting views challenge our thinking and keep a society alive and dynamic. It does become problematic when only radical points of view are heard, and the moderate voices in the debate disappear.

Polarization is different from conflict. In both cases there are two sides standing on opposite sides of each other. But in the case of conflict, both the people that have an issue and the issue itself are easier to identify. One person thinks this, the other person thinks that. This makes it easier to find a good, rational solution. The parties involved are more inclined to accept the solution. In the case of polarization, the issues are often more abstract, and it is harder to identify the people that are on opposite sides.

Many scientists agree that the climate is rapidly changing. These changes, including global warming, could lead to a world out of balance, with serious consequences for humans and animals. Because of this, scientists are increasingly sounding the alarm. Society, too, is increasingly calling for changes that would better protect the environment. But not everyone is convinced of the negative consequences of climate change, or is willing to implement the desired changes. Thus, two camps, two poles, quickly emerge around a theme. The growing frustrations lead to a strong 'us vs. them' mentality. We can understand the climate protests as an expression of these frustrations.


The theme polarization offers the opportunity to reflect on the climate debate and climate protests. When do protests go too far? Do protests lead to more polarization? Is protest always the right way to come to solutions? In what follows you are invited to reflect on those questions.

ASSIGNMENT. Watch the video clip. The story shows us how Ariella, frustrated with her school's decision to cut down a piece of forest, starts a protest group. Answer the following (sub)questions.

1. What is your opinion about the story?



1.1. Was Ariella right to protest?



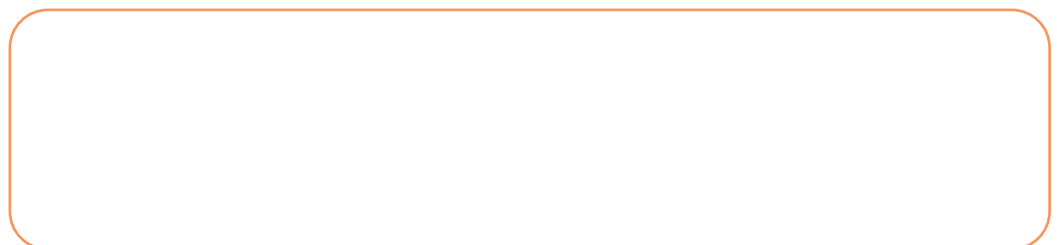
1.2. Is protesting a good way to draw attention to a problem? Would you join in the protest?



1.3. What actions is Ariella taking, or does she intend to take?



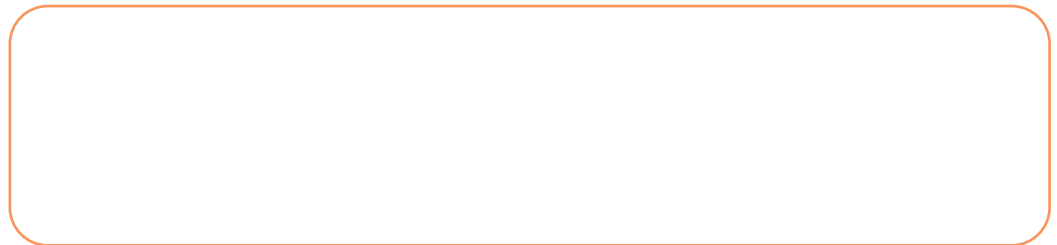
1.4. How does Ariella's environment react to her actions?



2. Ariella searches for 'ecological disasters' online. Look up the term 'ecological disaster'. Explain the meaning in your own words. What examples of ecological disasters do you recognize in the story (on Ariella's computer screen)? Are you worried about these things in real life? What is your opinion about the story? What do you remember?



3. Does Ariella participate in a 'us vs. them' kind of thinking?



3.2. Does the story show us a conflict, or polarization? Argue your position.



3.3 The school director invites Ariella and Levi for a conversation. Can a dialogue help solve an 'us vs. them' thinking? How?

3.4. How can we envision depolarization? Can you give examples of possible solutions?

3.5. Do you think it is possible to take action without polarizing? What could such a non-polarizing protest look like?



Figure 3.2
The Video Clip

3.3 BAL TASHCHIT

While Ariella searches for ecological disasters on the internet, we see two words reflected in her eyes: *bal tashchit*. The words *bal tashchit* refer to a prohibition from the Book of Deuteronomy. We speak of a prohibition in the case of a 'negative mitzvah': a mitzvah or commandment that prohibits certain behavior.

Bal *tashchit* means '**do not destroy**'. The Biblical Hebrew root sh.h.t. [destroy], *schachat*, is synonymous with the word *kilkul*, which means 'spoil' or 'corrupt'. Modern Hebrew translates sh.h.t. to: spoil, hurt, waste; destroy; sin; corrupt; murder.

The word 'destroy' should be understood in a broad sense, and is closely related to the notion of 'waste'!

ASSIGNMENT. Read the following passage. Then answer the questions.

3.3.1 BAL TASHCHIT - DEUT. 20:19-20

[19] When, in making war against a town in order to capture it, you lay siege to it for a long time, you are not to destroy its trees, cutting them down with an axe. You can eat their fruit, so don't cut them down. After all, are the trees in the field human beings, so that you have to besiege them too?

[20] However, if you know that certain trees provide no food, you may destroy them and cut them down, in order to build siege-works against the town making war with you, until it falls.

Mark in this passage the sentence that contains the bal tashhit prohibition.

Write down what you don't understand in this passage. Which sentence, expression, or term is unclear?

What is the passage about? Try to write down the essence as concisely as possible.



Figure 3.3
Source: © Gustavo Cruz /
Pexels

3.4 HOW TO INTERPRET? KAL V'HOMER!

The Tanakh's meanings are not always obvious. The Tanakh originated in a world that is very different from the present one. This makes understanding and interpreting difficult. But the Tanakh is still rich in meaning. Rabbis have developed various techniques to interpret and decipher all those meanings. Those techniques are like keys that open the lock of the Tanakh.

One of those interpretation keys is ***kal v'homer***. That literally means: **'from difficult to easy'**. In the Tanakh we often find commandments in very specific situations. *Kal v'homer* shows us how we can deduce something from a less probable situation for a more probable situation. Or in other words: what does a specific case tell us about how to behave in general?

The biblical prohibition *bal tashchit* forbids, in times of war, to cut down fruit trees to gather wood for a siege. Rabbis started to apply the prohibition in a broader sense, making it applicable to all kinds of useful materials, objects, and resources for humans, and even to the human body. That movement, from an exceptional, specific situation to a general one, is *kal v'homer*.



Figure 3.4
Source: © Delphotostock /
Adobe Stock

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the following questions.

What does bal taschit mean? Can you link it to other words?

Explain the kal v'homer principle using your own words.

Read the following Talmud passage. How does the Babylonian Talmud apply the kal v'homer principle?

**THE
BABYLONIAN TALMUD
– KIDDUSHIN 32A**

Whoever breaks vessels or rips up garments, destroys a building, stops up a fountain, or ruins food is guilty of violating the prohibition of bal tashchit.

Apply the kal v'homer principle to your own life. In what ways do we pollute or destroy? And can we do something about them?

3.5 PROFIT OR SUSTAINABILITY?

Passages from the Tanakh can be interpreted in different ways. This is also the case with the *bal tashchit* principle. So far we saw how rabbis mainly applied the principle to the notion of 'profit'. Profit is another term for utility or benefit. The question is: what yields the most benefit, the most profit? This requires a kind of calculation. According to this perspective, we have to protect what brings us the most benefit.

Not all rabbis agree with this interpretation. Nowadays more and more Jewish thinkers are trying to reconcile the *bal tashchit* principle with the concept of sustainability.

Sustainability means that things remain productive, healthy and diverse for a long time. This means that we use up resources to meet our needs, without taking away the ability of future generations to meet their needs.



Figure 3.5
Source: © Andrey Kuzmin
Adobe Stock

ASSIGNMENT. Read the article below by Rabbi David Seidenberg. Afterwards, solve the questions following the article.

“What seems to have been missed in past rabbinic interpretation of bal tashchit is that the rule given in the Torah is both literally and fundamentally about sustainability – about what sustains you.”

[...]

However, if we incorporate the spirit of the Torah, we can go far beyond such utilitarian measurements. The Torah after all doesn't just protect the trees when it says, “Is the tree of the field a person, to come before you in the siege?” It ascribes a kind of subjectivity to them.

More than this, the deepest Torah guidance is that we must respect the sources of life. That spirit is expressed in so many ways – including not just in bal tashchit, but also burying the blood/soul of a wild animal one has slaughtered, never eating blood, which represents the life force, and never combining milk, the source of life, with meat. Life – all life – is the purpose of Creation.

Indicates terms, phrases, and sentences that are unclear. Look up the meaning of ambiguous words, or ask the teacher or facilitator to clarify them.

What is Rabbi David Seidenberg's criticism of the previous bal tashchit interpretation? Explain using your own words.

Rabbi David Seidenberg states that the deepest guideline of the Torah is that we must 'respect all life'. What do you understand by 'respecting life'? In what way do you try to show respect to nature?

3.6 GLOSSARY

Consumption

Consumption refers to the using up of resources.

Ecosystem

An ecosystem is another word for a community of life, in which a collection of species or organisms interact with each other, and their environment. Ecosystem are part of the overall natural environment. Well-known examples of ecosystems are forests, lakes, rivers, and so on.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity is an abstract term. A possible synonym is 'personality'. In general, it refers to the whole of personal opinions, emotions, points of view, or tastes. David Seidenberg, as seen in this module, uses the term to suggest a similarity between humans and nature, as both are elements of Creation.

3.8 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

We see a family sitting in their living room. They're watching TV. There is a news reporting on the wildfires in Australia. We zoom in on the girl's face looking intrigued.

Father: Wait, is it THAT late? It's time for bed, Ariella.

Ariella (indignant): Wait, what? No! It was just getting interesting!

Mother: You've already stayed up later than usual. You've got school tomorrow!

Father (spurring on): Come on!

2 INT ROOM NIGHT

Ariella goes to her room. She is laying in bed, with her eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling. After a while she gets up and walks to the door. She opens the door carefully and enters the hall. It's dark; everyone has gone to bed. She stealthily walks through the hall. She enters another door.

3 INT COMPUTER ROOM NIGHT

Ariella takes a seat behind a computer. She starts looking up things like 'climate change' and 'climate crises'. The camera zooms in on her eyes while we see images mirrored in them, getting bigger, all of them depicting environmental disasters and climate strikes. Through the images, the words 'bal taschit' pop up.

Teacher: Ariella, wake up!

The background scene changes to that of a classroom. Ariella, who was dozing off, suddenly jumps upright. The class is laughing. One boy, Levi, looks concerned.

Ariella: I'm sorry! I wasn't sleeping!

Teacher: I understand the classes can be boring, but try to stay awake either way.

Ariella: I will! Sorry!

The school bell rings.

Teacher: All right, time for a break!

4 EXT PLAY GROUND DAY

The kids walk out of class, unto the playground.

Levi: How come you're so tired, Ariella?

Ariella: I've been up all night. There was a news reporting on those fires in Australia and...

The conversation becomes muted while we overhear another conversation taking place.

Student A: Well, that's a shame, do they HAVE to cut down the trees?

Ariella overhears the conversation.

Ariella: Huh? Sorry, what are you guys talking about?

Student A: They are planning on cutting down a part of the forest next to school.

Ariella: Why? How do you know this?

Student B: There's a problem with the lack of parking space. My dad's on the school board. They're working with the city council to find a solution.

Ariella: And they decided to cut down trees?

Student B: I guess so...

Ariella: Well, we can't let that happen. I have an idea...

5 EXT SCHOOL ENTRANCE DAY

A couple of days pass. Levi arrives at school. There's a group of students, all holding up signs. He recognizes Ariella, standing in front of the group, holding a petition. Everyone in the group is wearing green badges.

Levi: What's going on here?

Ariella: We're protesting! After hearing about the school's plans I've decided to take matters into my own hands. I've made a petition! And look, already ten people signed up!

Levi: Oh. So what are you going to do with this?

Ariella: Send it to the principal. And we already made some plans for if he doesn't want to listen.

Levi: Like what?

Ariella: He'll be sure to get the message if it's painted on the school walls... We got other things planned as well, but I can only tell you after you signed up and got your green badge. You wouldn't want a red one, would you? Here you go.

Ariella holds up the petition in front of Levi.

Levi (hesitant): Uhm... I don't know...

Ariella: What's wrong? As a Jew you're supposed to know how important this is!

Levi: What does that mean?

Ariella: Oh, come on, the Tanakh clearly forbids the destruction and waste of nature. There is literally a command called bal taschit. Do you even know what that means?

Principal: I do!

Ariella and Levi turn around in surprise. They see a man in a suit sizing them up.

Principal: Shalom!

Ariella and Levi: Shalom!

Ariella: I apologize, I didn't see you.

Principal: I have an idea: why don't you two join me in my office? Let's talk about this little revolution!

Ariella: Okay...

Principal (turning to the group): All right, everyone! Time to get to your classrooms!

6 INT PRINCIPAL OFFICE DAY

The principal enters the school building, followed by Levi and Ariella.

Principal: Take a seat. You two had quite the interesting discussion going on. Ariella, would you like to tell me what's going on?

Ariella: We heard about the school's plans to cut down the trees. As Jewish people, we can't let that happen. It's forbidden.

Principal: Oh yes, you mentioned the famous bal taschit-command. What can you tell me about it?

Ariella: It's a command from the Book of Genesis that means: 'You shall not destroy'. It's a negative command because it prohibits you from doing something. In this case, it prohibits the school from carelessly destroying the forest.

Principal: I see. Well, this might ease your mind: the school board and city council have agreed to create a new bus stop. No trees will be cut down.

Ariella: Oh, well, that's goo -

Principal: But that's not the important issue I want to talk about. Why were some students wearing green badges, and did others get red ones?

Ariella: So that we know who's on our side...

Principal: Why did you need to create sides?

Ariella: Because the bal taschit-command is absolute! It's pretty simple! I've read a lot about it.

Principal: Have you read the Torah-passage in which you can find the command?

Ariella doesn't respond. She never did. The principal opens one of the slides of his desk and grabs the bible out of it.

Principal: "When, in making war against a town in order to capture it, you lay siege to it for a long time, you are not to destroy its trees, cutting them down with an axe. You can eat their fruit, so don't cut them down. After all, are the trees in the field human beings, so that you have to besiege them too?"

Levi: So it's about not cutting down fruit trees in times of war, as long as they are still useful!

Ariella: But then why did I find the command being applied to other situations?

Principal: Because the Tanakh can mean many things, and we can discuss these different meanings. Discussion and interpretation is the way we learn! So protesting can be a good way to raise concerns, and ask important questions loud and clear, but let's not turn on each other just yet.

Ariella: Okay... I'll talk to the others. I'm sorry. But the trees are safe?

Principal: They definitely are. If not, I would just replant them in my office!

They all laugh. Levi and Ariella are visibly relieved.

Principal: All right, let's get to class, you two. I'll speak to the teacher. Chop chop!

Ariella looks up at those last two words.

Principal: I don't mean that literally!

3.9 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bernstein, Ellen, & Fink, Dan. "Blessings and Praise" and "Bal Tashchit". In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. Second Edition. Edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 457-476. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

The Complete Jewish Bible. Translated by David H. Stern. Clarksville MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2017.

Lamm, Norman. "Bal Tashchit: The Torah Prohibits Wasteful Destruction." *MyJewishLearning*. Accessed May 31 2020. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/bal-tashhit-the-torah-prohibits-wasteful-destruction/>.

National Research Council. "References." In *Advancing the Science of Climate Change*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2010. 421-474. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12782>.

Neril, Yonatan. "Judaism and Environmentalism: Bal Tashchit". *Chabad*. Accessed May 31, 2020. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1892179/jewish/Judaism-and-Environmentalism-Bal-Tashchit.htm.

Pollefeyt, Didier. "De Bijbel in het Ecologische Debat." *Ter Herkenning* 22, no 3 (November 1994): 168-180.

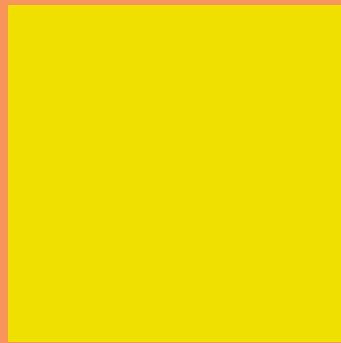
Schwartz, Eilon. "Judaism and Nature: Theological and Moral Issues to Consider While Renegotiating a Jewish Relationship to the Natural World." In *Judaism And Environmental Ethics: A Reader*. Edited by Martin D. Yaffe, 297-308. Lexington Books, 2001.

The William Davidson Talmud. "Kiddushin 32a." Sefaria. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://www.sefaria.org/Kiddushin.32a?lang=bi>

Seidenberg, David. "Bal Tashchit: What's Wrong With the Jewish Law Against Destruction and Waste – and How to Fix It". *Tikkun*. Accessed June 5, 2020.

Wolff, K.A. "Bal Tashchit: The Jewish Prohibition against Needless Destruction." PhD. Diss., University of Leiden, 2009. <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/14448>.

4



WHEN ENCOUNTER BECOMES
CONFLICT: JUST WAR AND
JUST PEACE

MODULE FOUR

WHEN ENCOUNTER BECOMES CONFLICT: JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

4.1 A STORY



Figure 4.1
The Video Clip

A school trip brings Ariella to a war museum. Struck by the tragedy of war, she gets lost in the museum. There she encounters a mysterious Jewish janitor. Together they discuss the Jewish tradition of war.

4.2 HOLY WAR OR PACIFISM

Speaking of war and peace is nothing new. Speaking of war and peace is also strongly present in the Jewish tradition. In particular, war and peace both appear in the Torah. On the one hand, the Torah emphasizes the absolute importance of peace and harmony between and within all peoples. The word 'shalom,' which includes the meaning of 'peace,' is a central example of this. On the other hand, the Torah also contains many stories of war. These two sides have their own theory: pacifism on the one hand, and Holy War on the other.

1. Pacifism is an attitude or doctrine that seeks peace and disapproves of the use of force to resolve conflicts (between nations).

Political power building is out of the question. According to this doctrine, for example, a country cannot introduce military service. Judaism is not pacifist because there is a lot of violence in the Torah. Harmony, peace and justice are important concepts in Judaism, however. Pacifism also raises many questions of interest to Judaism. How do we handle violent passages? Can pacifism inspire? Throughout history, Judaism has often prioritized indulgence and passivity. Can we see those values as pacifist? And at the same time, we can ask the critical question: is pacifism always something positive? Isn't self-defense, for example, just?

2. Holy War is a form of collective violence authorized or commanded by G-d. In the Torah we find many violent passages.

Joshua is commanded to conquer the Promised Land, with great violence. There is also the war against Amalek. King David, in turn, is known for his expansionist wars against the Arameans. Many of the wars, such as Joshua's War of Conquest, were commanded by G-d. The reading of the book of Esther, in which the Jews commit mass murder, is the central event of the Purim festival. The Torah also describes G-d as a warrior, and the human warriors (Joshua, David, Esther, etc.) are depicted as heroes. Violence in the name of G-d is thus a common theme in Judaism. Judaism has its own history with the phenomenon of Holy War.

ASSIGNMENT. Reflect on the concepts of “pacifism” and “holy war”.

Describe pacifism in your own words.

Would you describe Judaism as ‘pacifist’? Why yes/no?

Are there pacifist ideas in Judaism?

Holy War means collective violence in the name of g-d. What is your opinion of Holy War? Is Holy War just?

Do you think Holy War also exists within Judaism?

ASSIGNMENT. Choose a statement from the following list with which you most identify. Explain why.

- “War is never just.”
- “Peace can only exist alongside war.”
- “Never do anything in a war that makes reconciliation impossible afterwards.”
- “A world without violence is not realistic.”
- “Violence begins or ends with yourself.”
- “Even in times of peace, it is important for a country to invest in weapons.”
- “Risking your own life for a stranger in another country is useless.”



Figure 4.2
Source: © Syda Productions
Adobe Stock

4.3 WAR IN THE TORAH

A theory of war that tries to limit damage and suffering as much possible is called a **Just War-theory**. Such a theory establishes rules that regulate the beginning, course, and end of a war. The purpose of these rules is to make war as just as possible. Within the Jewish tradition we find no extensive Just War theory.

We are thus limited in our discussion of war. In the Torah we find a text from the book of Deuteronomy that discusses warfare. This text is fodder for discussion in the Talmud. We first read the text, and then we discuss how the Talmud further elaborates on it.

DEUTERONOMY 20

[5] “Then the officials will speak to the soldiers. They are to say, ‘Is there a man here who has built a new house, but hasn’t dedicated it yet? He should go back home now; otherwise he may die fighting, and another man will dedicate it. [6] “Is there a man here who has planted a vineyard, but hasn’t yet made use of its fruit? He should go back home; otherwise he may die fighting, and another man will use it. [7] “Is there a man here who is engaged to a woman, but hasn’t married her yet? He should go back home; otherwise he may die fighting, and another man will marry her.’ [8] “The officials will then add to what they have said to the soldiers: ‘Is there a man here who is afraid and fainthearted? He should go back home; otherwise his fear may demoralize his comrades as well.’ [9] When the officials have finished speaking with the soldiers, commanders are to be appointed to lead the army. [10] “When you advance on a town to attack it, first offer it terms for peace. [11] If it accepts the terms for peace and opens its gates to you, then all the people there are to be put to forced labor and work for you. [12] However, if they refuse to make peace with you but prefer to make war against you, you are to put it under siege. [13] When *Adonai* your God hands it over to you, you are to put every male to the sword. [14] However, you are to take as booty for yourself the women, the little ones, the livestock, and everything in the city — all its spoil. Yes, you will feed on your enemies’ spoil, which *Adonai* your God has given you. [15] This is what you are to do to all the towns which are at a great distance from you, which are not the towns of these nations. [16] “As for the towns of these peoples, which *Adonai* your God is giving you as your inheritance, you are not to allow anything that breathes to live. [17] Rather you must destroy them completely — the Hitti, the Emori, the Kena’ani, the P’rizi, the Hivi and the Y’vusi — as *Adonai* your God has ordered you; [18] so that they won’t teach you to follow their abominable practices, which they do for their gods, thus causing you to sin against *Adonai* your God.

Four things emerge from this text:

- 1) A **peace settlement** is mandatory for any attack. Even today, it is still important to prevent as much violence as possible.
- 2) There are **four valid reasons** for deferring military service. Because of these four reasons, a Jew need not go to war. The reasons are: a recently planted vineyard, a recent engagement, a newly built house, and fear. Many countries have mandatory military service. The Torah recognizes that there are exceptions, reasons for deferring military service.
- 3) The **reason for warfare** is to prevent the Jewish people from being affected by the wickedness of the nations with whom they share a territory. The “horrible things they do for their gods” must not be adopted by the Jews.
- 4) The Torah makes a **distinction between cities** that are “at a great distance,” outside the Promised Land, and those that are nearby, in the Promised Land. This distinction has to do with the third point.



Figure 4.3
Source: © Georgiy
Adobe Stock

4.4 WAR IN THE TALMUD

The Mishnah turns to the war passage discussed above, and asks in what case the four reasons for postponing military service are valid. “To what type of war does all this refer?” (Mishnah Sotah 2). The Mishna answers that question by distinguishing between a **commanded war** (*milchemet mitzvah*) and an **optional war** (*milchemet reshut*).

A milchemet mitzvah or commanded war is commanded by G-d. A commanded war is necessary and does not allow for exceptions. Everyone must go to war. According to the Talmud, a commanded war may take place even on Sabbath. **An optional war is discretionary.** This war allows for various reasons for deferments from military service. A discretionary war is still possible, but not the result of a G-dly commandment. The Gemara builds on this distinction. We discuss the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud separately, because each puts forward its own view.

4.4.1 THE JERUSALEM TALMUD

The Jerusalem Talmud defines a **discretionary war as one that Israel initiates**. Israel is not commanded to attack anyone. And since the Promised Land has already been conquered, further wars serve only to expand the territory. A commanded war is obligatory; everyone must participate in it. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, only the wars of Joshua and defensive wars are commanded.

The Jerusalem Talmud recognizes the right of self-defense. For the ancient Israelites, this meant that since the Promised Land had been conquered, they now had to protect it. In addition, there is an important conclusion that can be drawn from the Jerusalem Talmud. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, only defensive wars and the Wars of Conquest of Joshua were commanded and thus sacred. However, those wars took place thousands of years ago. The Jerusalem Talmud thus seems to state Holy Wars are not possible today.

4.4.2 THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

The Babylonian Talmud has a different perspective. This perspective became predominant. The Babylonian Talmud agrees with the Jerusalem Talmud on two points: a discretionary war is one that Israel initiates, and the Conquest Wars of Joshua were commanded, obligatory wars. However, the Babylonian Talmud does not mention defensive wars. It does give an additional example of discretionary wars: **David's wars of expansion**. Expansive wars serve only to expand territory, and are thus discretionary. A separate status is given to **preemptive strikes**. A preemptive strike is a military action that aims to first weaken the enemy to prevent a hostile attack. preemptive strikes are a gray area.

Whether they are ordered depends on the degree of certainty with which can be determined that an attack is coming. The Talmud seems to suggest that, if this can be determined, preemptive strikes count as *milchemet mitzvah*.

	Discretionary	Commanded
Mishnah	Deferments	No deferments
Jerusalem Talmud	Israel initiates	Joshua's Wars and defensive wars
Babylonian Talmud	Israel initiates, David's Wars (preemptive strikes)	Joshua's Wars (preemptive strikes)

War in the ancient Near East proceeded differently than today. Optional wars had to be authorized by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court. In addition, the oracle *Urim VeTumim* had to be consulted (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 3b, Sanhedrin 16b). Thus, the Jewish people were only allowed to go to war if the Sanhedrin and the oracle allowed it. A leader or king did not have free rein! Today, the Sanhedrin and the oracle no longer exist.

Diaspora communities do not have their own army. Therefore, Jewish discussions of war are usually about the state of Israel. Not every Jew is equally concerned with the state of Israel, but a healthy discussion of war and peace can help us understand the world better. The distinction between commanded and optional wars still matters today, and they help explain why certain wars are important to some Jews. Whether a war of Israel is commanded or optional is a contemporary point of debate. The Talmud gives us food for thought.

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the following questions.

A commanded war

- Is a war ordered by a political leader.
- Allows people to refuse to participate.
- Is commanded by G-d and allows no exceptions.

A discretionary war

- Is a war commanded by G-d
- Is a war at the discretion of G-d
- Is a war that does not allow for deferment of military service

Right or wrong. According to the Talmud, future wars are possible. Please justify your answer.

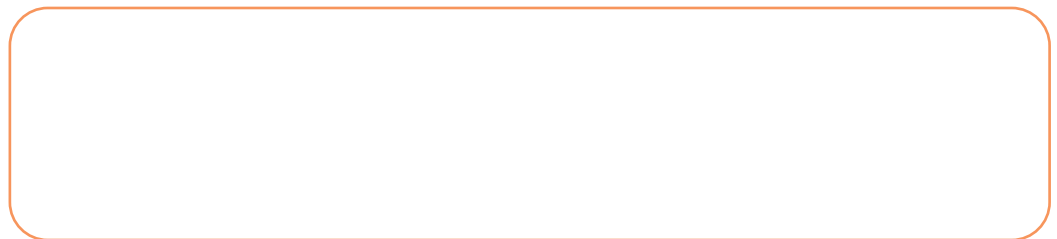
Is the concept of a 'Commanded War' credible? Do you believe in it? Why do/don't you?

Is a preemptive strike justifiable? Why yes/no? In which cases are they?

The Sanhedrin and the oracle Urim VeTumim used to play a major role in the decision to start a war. Who do you think has the right to start a war? The government, a large group of residents, rabbis, ...



The Torah states that if hostile cities do not accept a peace settlement, the male inhabitants may all be killed. In your opinion, are there any rules for how a war may proceed? Or is all violence permitted?



4.5 GLOSSARY

Discretionary

Discretionary refers to the ability to judge or act independently, at your own discretion.

Holy War

A Holy War is a war with a religious motive. A Holy War is sometimes waged because of a Godly obligation, because of a religious position, but also in defense of a holy land.

Righteousness

righteousness has several meanings. First, justice is a legal concept. Whatever is in accordance with the law is just. Second, justice is also a moral concept. To act justly is to act “rightly,” in accordance with what is “good” or “correct. Justice also takes practice: no one naturally does the right or good thing all the time. We encounter this idea often in the Tenach!

Pacifism

Pacifism is an attitude or worldview that seeks peace absolutely. Pacifism rejects any form of violence.

Peace Settlement

A peace settlement is an agreement between two parties, often countries, to keep the peace and not go to war.

4.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT MUSEUM DAY

The tour guide and teacher are standing in front of the group.

Tour Guide: Welcome to the Museum of War. We have a large collection of First World War artifacts, not just weapons and arms, but also items from everyday life. You might get an impression on how it would be to live during such times!

Teacher: All right, everyone is free to go and look around for themselves. Let's meet up back here in time. The bus won't wait, ok! Make sure you keep each other in sight, and don't get lost!

The students run off in different directions. We follow Ariella and Adil who walk past some uniforms.

Adil: Hey, can you imagine me wearing one of those? You would probably fall in love with me.

Ariella: In your dreams.

They walk past a corner. They're surrounded by pictures depicting battle scenes.

Ariella: Can you imagine living through such a war? Even today people are still at war, in the 21st century.

Adil: Yeah, but what can you do about it?

Ariella (sighing): I don't know, but war should never happen.

Adil doesn't respond. He hesitates to speak. Something's on his mind.

Adil: Wow. That's a bit hypocritical coming from you.

Ariella: What do you mean?

Adil: You're Jewish, right? The Torah is full of stories of war. Like the wars to conquer the Promised Land. And you read these stories yearly.

Ariella: You mean Joshua's Wars of Conquest? Look, it's not because we have those stories that we are suddenly pro-war or something.

Adil: Yeah, but they must have some kind of effect. Some people read religious texts literally, you know. I wouldn't be surprised if these stories actually inspire people to start wars.

Ariella: That could never happen. Jews are one hundred percent peaceful.

Adil: Don't make me laugh. If that were the case, you wouldn't have those stories.

Ariella: Whatever, you don't know what you're talking about! I'm out of here.

Ariella walks away angrily.

Ariella: I can't believe him. What does he know about Judaism?

While walking she accidentally misses the pathway that leads to the main hall. She suddenly bumps into a janitor.

Ariella: Ow, I'm so sorry, sir.

Janitor: You look lost.

Ariella turns around and notices that she is, indeed, lost.

Ariella (shy): I guess I am... Could you tell me how to reach the main hall, please?

Janitor: I'll take you. Follow me.

The janitor starts walking and Ariella follows suit.

Janitor: So, did the museum leave an impression?

Ariella: To be honest, it's very disconcerting. It's hard to imagine a war like this happened.

Janitor: The sad part about it is that so many wars took place.

Ariella: I know... I'm Jewish, and someone recently reminded me of all the stories of war in the Torah.

Janitor: Shalom!

Ariella (surprised): Shalom! You're Jewish too?

Janitor: Yes! So, what do you think about those stories?

Ariella: Well, war is horrible, of course, but I always thought that Joshua's Wars of Conquest were somewhat... Necessary. That without going to war, the ancient Israelites would have never reached the Promised Land. But that doesn't mean that I think war is a good idea! I guess I never thought about it much; my Jewish community doesn't really mention war a lot.

Janitor: I understand. There is a historic reason for that: Jewish communities did not always possess armies, so they didn't spend a lot of time thinking about war.

Ariella: So no one said anything?

Janitor: Well, the old rabbis made an important distinction between commanded and discretionary wars. Commanded wars are, as the name suggests, commanded by Hashem. They are sacred and important, so every Jew must partake in them. Discretionary wars are less important, and therefore Jews cannot be forced to partake in them. An example of discretionary wars are so-called 'expansionary wars': wars to conquer new territory.

Ariella: So what about the wars to conquer the Promised Land in the Torah?

Janitor: The Talmud deems them commanded wars! But here's the catch: many rabbis believe that these were the only truly commanded wars in Jewish history. And that in any case, if war ever becomes necessary, for instance in the case of self-defense, there are still principles to uphold. Like offering peace first, only fighting to achieve peace, and preventing the loss of innocent lives as much as possible. Let's not forget that Judaism values peace above all else!

Ariella and the janitor have almost reached the main entrance hall. The noise of people talking gets louder.

Ariella: I think I understand. I wish I could keep talking to you about this.

Janitor: Some other time. I have to go back now.

Ariella: Okay. Thank you for helping!

Janitor: Goodbye!

As Ariella walks away she suddenly remembers something she wants to say.

Ariella: Wait, where did you have to go back to?

Ariella turns to find the hall empty. The janitor seems to have disappeared.

3 INT MUSEUM DAY

As Ariella reaches the main hall she is greeted by the teacher and tour guide. The tour guide's hair is in disarray.

Teacher: At last! There you are! We checked every single hall!

Ariella: That's strange, I was walking through all them with the janitor. He helped me find my way back.

Guide: Uhm, no, well the janitor was not working today. Well, I don't think so.

Teacher: I guess the museum made their imagination run wild. Thank you for the tour. I'm sure it left a big impression on all of them.

4 EXT BUS DAY

Ariella gets on the bus. She sees Adil sitting alone and goes to sit next to him.

Adil: Hey, look, I'm sorry if I hurt you, I didn't mean to say you were violent or anything like that.

Ariella: I know. The museum just gave me a lot to think about. Hey, do you want to come over after school? My mom is making a special dish and...

As the bus drives off, the audio of Ariella and Adil's conversation distorts and shizzles out. The image shifts to that of an empty museum hall. The camera slowly zooms in on a picture on the wall. The old picture reveals the janitor in a 1915's war costume. He winks at the camera before the screen turns black.

4.7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Complete Jewish Bible. Translated by David H. Stern. Clarksville MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2017.

Firestone, Reuven. *Holy War in Judaism: the Rise and Fall of a Controversial Idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

- Holy War in Modern Judaism? "Mitzvah War" and the Problem of the "Three Vows". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Vol. 74, No. 4 (Dec., 2006) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The William Davidson Talmud. "Sotah 44b:1-9." Sefaria. Toegang 23 april, 2021.

<https://www.sefaria.org/Sotah.44b.1-9?lang=bi>.

Mechon Mamre Talmud Yerushalmi. "Sotah 8:10 (23a)". Sefaria Toegang 23 april 2021.

https://www.sefaria.org/Jerusalem_Talmud_Sotah.23a?lang=bi

KU LEUVEN



Prof. Dr. Luc Anckaert (*1962) holds degrees in Philosophy and Theology at the KU Leuven. He published books and articles on Rosenzweig, Levinas, Kafka, V. Grossman and biblical narratives, but also on biomedical topics. His book *A Critique of Infinity. Rosenzweig and Levinas* was awarded a golden medal by the Teyler Foundation. He teaches Jewish Philosophy at the KU Leuven.

Pierre Costalunga (Luik, 1997) is a scientific researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, KU Leuven, Belgium. Costalunga graduated from KU Leuven (Belgium) with a bachelor's and master's degree in Philosophy. He is part of the center for Research in Political Philosophy and Ethics (RIPPLE).



EDUC8 Consortium



This book was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police.



9 789464 449150 >