



HOW CAN WE JUDGE THE MORALITY OF WAR?



THE 4HQ OF IT... TO BE + A BIT OF PEOPLE AND FREEDOM

This session focuses in on the question of security - To be. Given that Israel is in a dangerous area, and given that there are times when warfare is our only option - what is the moral way to fight? In defending ourselves, are we going against our own understanding of what it means to be a good Jew? [People] How does a soldier hold such responsibility? [Freedom]

AIMS

- Learners will appreciate how Gaza came to be a different political entity from the West Bank.
- Learners will grapple with the moral challenges of asymmetric warfare
- Learners will emerge having practiced language that enables them to engage in constructive discussions of the morality of warfare

INTRODUCTION TO THIS UNIT

We have explored three meanings of occupation

- * O word #1 - it's about security and our land and it's not occupation
- * O word #2 - it's about the freedom of the Palestinians over the Green Line
- * O word #3 - it's about 1948 - the Zionist occupation started in 1948 and every attack against Jews is resistance because we are still fighting the war of 1948

O words #1 and #2 refer only to the land known as the West Bank, Judea and Samaria. The other area of Palestinians that Israel indirectly controls is in the Gaza strip.

PART 1: THINGS TO KNOW - 15 MINUTES



[View a short video about the recent history of Gaza.](#)

There are many in Israel who will argue that since Hamas believes in O word #3, and feels fully justified in attacking the Zionist invader, they will forever be our enemy. As an eternal enemy, we must always return fire with fire, and fight whenever necessary. There are others who believe that Hamas does not necessarily represent the majority of Palestinians in Gaza, and were Israel to deal more kindly towards those living in Gaza and give more respect to their leaders, perhaps peace might be achieved.

Thus when fighting breaks out between Gaza and Israel, there are those who will always blame Hamas, and there are those who will always blame Israel.

What is clear is that the blame or responsibility for the breakout of hostilities lies at the feet of the respective leaders. But the fighting itself is undertaken by soldiers. For Israeli soldiers fighting in Gaza, their moral challenges are far greater than during “regular warfare.” This session will focus particularly on the morality of asymmetric warfare.

PART 2 - WHAT WAS GOOD ABOUT THE BATTLE OF THE BASTARDS? - 15 MINUTES

Although the world of Game of Thrones was far from real, its depiction of the Battle of the Bastards can teach us much about how wars used to be fought.



[Screen this scene](#), asking learners to find as many answers as possible to the following question: *What makes this battle safe for non-combatants?* [Ask participants to answer from what they see, not from their deep knowledge of the series!]

The Geneva Convention of 1949 was a response to something avoidable and something unavoidable. Signatories to the Convention agreed that wars were sometimes unavoidable, but that unnecessary harm to civilians and to non-combatants could be carefully avoided.

In the discussion following the question about the Battle of the Bastards, your group may well come up with some of the main points of the Geneva Convention:

- Battles must take place far from civilian homes
- Combatants must identify themselves with uniforms and banners
- Battles take place at a particular pre-arranged time

Make sure to draw these three points out, and then to point to the nature of asymmetrical warfare in Gaza: The enemy combatant may well be dressed like a civilian, may well be fighting in civilian towns and cities, and the fighting may take place at any time.

Given this kind of enemy, how might an Israeli soldier avoid harming civilians?

PART 3 - DILEMMA AND JUST WAR - 30 MINUTES

If the group is small, have this conversation together. If it is over 10 people, divide the group into groups of 3-4 and have them discuss the following dilemma:

A commander is in charge of 10 young soldiers. They are being shot at from an apartment block. He must stop the shooting, before any of his soldiers get hurt.

*Intelligence tells him the building has been cleared of residents. But intelligence is never 100%
He can call in the air force, and tell them to destroy the building. Thus risking killing civilians left in the building.*

He can decide they will work through the building apartment by apartment until they kill those shooting at them. Thus risking his own soldiers.

What should he do?



[Print-out available here](#)

Either in the middle of the discussion, if you feel the participants could benefit from additional concepts, or if you feel that the discussion is coming to its conclusion, screen this video:



[Three brothers, Just War, and Asymmetric Warfare](#)

In the ensuing discussion, toggle between talking about the concepts of asymmetric warfare, and the specific dilemma presented about the young commander.

Particularly important is to dwell on the concept of "proportionality". Disproportionality is not about comparative death-counts, nor it is about comparative fire-power: It is about whether the force used is proportionate to the need to achieve the mission's purpose. The video talks of a bomb or a tennis-ball in a children's play-park, while the case study explores bombing an apartment block. If your learners are beginning to explore "proportionality" in these contexts, you are succeeding!

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Just War Theory has its origins in the Catholic Church. You might also wish to invite your learners to ponder Moses' exhortation in Deuteronomy 16:20:

צְדָקָה צְדָקָה תְּرַדְּךָ לְמַעַן תִּחְיָה וַיְרַשְּׁת אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נָתָן לְךָ: {ס}

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land
that your God is giving you.

Why did the notoriously concise Bible repeat the word "Justice"? Why say the word twice? One of many commentators to offer their interpretation, Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshishcha in the 18th century suggested:

"Justice, justice you shall pursue... *With justice, you shall pursue justice.* Even the pursuit of justice must employ only just means, and not falsehood."

Applied to our conversation we might say that even if we are justified in going to war, even if defeating our enemy is the Just thing to do, we must also make sure that we are waging war in a just fashion.