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## War and Peace

War is ugly. It has been a scourge of humanity from time immemorial and it continues to plague humanity today. War entails fighting and killing enemies. It entails a vast commitment of resources to mobilize and arm one's forces and to strengthen one's defenses. It involves heavy financial, social and psychological costs. It entails casualties and loss of life. War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook taught: "We must see life in two dimensions, as it is, and as it should be. Absolute righteousness is always rooted in how things should be, but provisional righteousness which touches more on acting in the present, is built on how things actually are...The two are connected, like alternating horizons on a long journey." (Igrot Ha Reiyah, I94).

How things should be: peaceful, with love prevailing among humankind. How things are: warlike, with hatred and violence spreading like wildfire.

How are we to deal with this dichotomy? We are to maintain our commitment to absolute righteousness, peace, a world of love and harmony. At the same time, we must deal with harsh realities with strength and courage. Even while engaging in ugly warfare, our dreams need to be squarely focused on peace.

The Torah tells of a war between the Israelites and the Midianites. Moses calls upon the Israelites to gather men to go to battle. Rashi comments that the men to be chosen as warriors must be "tsadikim," righteous people. At first glance, this is a strange comment. One would think that the men to be chosen as soldiers would be selected on the basis of their physical prowess, their courage, their skill with weaponry. What does righteousness have to do with warfare?

I think Rashi's comment precisely reflects the classic Jewish view of warfare. Those who go to battle must not only be capable warriors, but must be righteous. They must keep the ideals of peace, compassion, and morality always in mind. Each soldier needs to operate on two dimensions: how things should be, and how things actually are.

As I write these lines, Israel is engaged in an ugly war. Hamas terrorists have fired many hundreds of missiles at Israeli cities and towns. Their hatred of Israel knows no bounds; they intentionally aim at Israeli civilians; they place their own civilians as "human shields" in the face of Israeli retaliatory strikes. The Israeli Defense Forces have targeted Hamas arms caches, missile launch pads, terrorist leaders. Israel seeks to destroy Hamas's capacity to fire missiles into Israel. Israel tries to avoid civilian casualties but casualties are inevitable.

Some world "leaders" and media figures are quick to attack Israel for its attacks which are not "proportional." One wonders what a "proportional" response ought to be when two-thirds of the population of one's country is under constant threat of missile attacks. Would any other country tolerate an onslaught of missiles aimed at their civilian centers of population? Wouldn't every responsible nation attempt to crush the capabilities of the enemy? Indeed, wouldn't it be highly irresponsible and immoral of a nation not to defend its citizens who are being barraged by enemy missiles?

The greatness of Israel and its Defense Forces is not only in their incredible courage, power, intelligence and resilience. The greatness of Israel and its Defense Forces is precisely in striving to be "tsadikim" even during warfare.

Anyone who knows anything at all about Israel, knows that this is a country that wants peace, that strives for peace, that has sacrificed incredibly to attain peace. But in spite of Israel's desire for peace, its enemies preach hatred, violence, terrorism, and the most vicious anti-Israel, anti-Jewish propaganda.

War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer. But we must view life in two dimensions: as it is, and as it should be. As it is: we must fight in order to maintain ourselves and our nation. As it should be: we are fighting for a righteous, loving and peaceful world.

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