

After the destruction of the Second Temple and the expulsion of the Jews from Israel by the Romans in 70 CE, Jews lived under the authority of other governments. The Talmudic principle of "dina d'malchuta dina," meaning that "the law of the land is the law [that one must abide by]," has shaped how Jews relate to the civil laws of the societies in which they live.

- What do you think is the reasoning behind the principle of "dina d'malchuta dina?"
- Which Jewish values might support or challenge "dina d'malchuta dina?"
- How does "dina d'malchuta dina" manifest in your life?

Jewish communities tend to observe their government's laws: they obey the speed limit, pay taxes, and comply with building codes. Is "dina d'malchuta dina" simply about responsible Jewish citizenship, or does it suggest a deeper relationship between Jewish law and civil authority?

As you read the following sources, consider whether they strengthen, limit, complicate, or challenge the principle of "dina d'malchuta dina."

ויקרא י"ח:ג'

כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכְּתֶם בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּכְמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ
וּבְחֻקֵּיהֶם לֹא תֵלְכוּ:

Leviticus 18:3

You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you, nor shall you follow their laws.

- Which types of practices do you think this verse refers to, and what are the concerns about the Jewish community adopting surrounding cultural norms?
- How might this complicate the idea of "dina d'malchuta dina?"

ירמיהו כ"ט:ז'

וּדְרֹשׁוּ אֶת שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגְלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בַּעֲדָהּ אֵל ה' כִּי בְשָׁלוֹמָהּ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שְׁלוֹם:

Jeremiah 29:7

And seek the peace of the city where I have exiled you and pray for it to the Lord, for in its peace you shall have peace.

- Does "seeking the peace" imply passive coexistence, active contribution, or political loyalty?
- Does this source strengthen the case for "dina d'malchuta dina," or does it suggest an alternative relationship with civil authority?

משנה אבות ב:ג'

הוּוּ זְהִירִין בְּרִשּׁוֹת, שְׂאִין מְקַרְבִּין לוֹ לְאָדָם אֶלָּא לְצַרְךָ עֲצָמוֹ. נִרְאִין כְּאוֹהֲבִין בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּאֻתָן, וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לוֹ לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת דְּחֻקוֹ:

Mishna Avot 2:3

Be cautious when dealing with the authorities, as they may only befriend a person for their own advantage. They act like friends when it suits them, but they don't stand by a person in their times of trouble.

- How might this perspective shape the way Jews relate to secular law?
- Does caution toward authorities strengthen or weaken the case for "dina d'malchuta dina"?
- How does this source relate to the previous sources?

רמב"ם משנה תורה, הלכות גזלה ואבדה ה:א

שְׁדִין הַמֶּלֶךְ דִּין הוּא. וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁהוּא עוֹבֵר הַמְּבָרִיחַ מִמֶּכֶס זֶה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא גּוֹזֵל מִנֵּת הַמֶּלֶךְ בֵּין שְׁהִיָּה הַמֶּלֶךְ עֲבוֹרָה, בֵּין שְׁהִיָּה הַמֶּלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Theft and Lost Properties 5:11

For the law established by the king is a binding law. Indeed, anyone who does not pay this tax transgresses, for he is taking what is due the king. This applies whether the king is Jewish or gentile.

- How does labeling tax evasion as theft reflect "dina d'malchuta dina"?
- Does the Rambam imply that all civil laws are binding or only certain ones?
- What impact might this quote have on how Jews are perceived within society?

Members of some Jewish communities struggle with the principle of "dina d'malchuta dina." The postcard below has two contrasting images: on one side, a respected religious leader sits comfortably, being served; on the other side, a political authority appears stern, while a weak religious figure appeals to him for help.

While looking at this postcard, think about:

- What message might the artist be communicating about religious versus civil authority?
- What reservations toward "dina d'malchuta dina" are being expressed through the comparison of the two images?
- How does this postcard relate to the sources above?



1960 Postcard from Basel, Switzerland

A Talk Between Two Jewish Men

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Teshuvot Igrot Moshe 2:29

Besides the prohibitions of theft, there are other terrible sins involved, including lying, deceiving, creating Chillul Hashem [desecration of God's name] and disgracing Torah and those who study it...and this sin also causes great harm to the great Torah scholars and their students who scrupulously avoid any trace of concern for theft and the like [by ruining their reputations].

- How does this source expand the reasoning behind obeying civil law?
- Is obedience framed primarily as civic duty, religious obligation, moral integrity, or communal responsibility?
- How might this perspective respond to the concerns raised in the earlier sources?
- In your opinion, does this concern apply today?

Guidelines for "Dina D'Malchuta Dina"

While it is understandable that Jewish communities observe their government's laws: they obey the speed limit, pay taxes, and comply with building codes, what happens when civil law conflicts with Jewish law or values?

גמרא ברכות דף ס"א עמוד ב

תנו רבנן: פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו ישראל בתורה. בא פפוס בן יהודה ומצאו לרבי עקיבא שהיה מקהיל קהלות ברבים ועוסק בתורה. אמר לו: עקיבא, אי אתה מתירא מפני מלכות?

Talmud Brachot 61b

The Sages taught: One time, after the Bar Kokhba rebellion, the evil empire of Rome decreed that Israel may not engage in the study and practice of Torah. Pappos ben Yehuda came and found Rabbi Akiva, who was convening assemblies in public and engaging in Torah study, and said to him, are you not afraid of the empire?

- What do Rabbi Akiva's actions suggest about the limits to "dina d'malchuta dina"?
- Does this story present resistance against secular law as an exception, required, or contextual?
- Are there contemporary situations where this tension might arise?

Rakefet-Rothkoff, Aaron. "Dina D'Malkhuta Dina — The Law of the Land in Halakhic Perspective." *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1972, p. 10. JSTOR.

Dina d'malkhuta does not automatically validate all the [secular] laws. Besides being subsumed under the category of mammona [finances], the laws must be just, equitable, and applicable to all citizens and residents of the state. The basic idea is that Dina D'Malkhuta is acceptable, but Chamsa D'Malkhuta or Gazlanuta D'Malkhuta, malevolent, ill-disposed, and unjust laws, are to be rejected. The Jew must only observe the decrees of a just government, but is not obligated to observe the rulings of a despotic regime.

- What criteria are introduced for the implementation of "dina d'malchuta dina"?
- Who determines whether a law is unjust?
- How does this source build on or refine the story of Rabbi Akiva?

Wrapping Up

The custom of sending Rosh Hashanah greeting cards became widespread in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many cards combined religious imagery with national symbols, reflecting both Jewish identity and civic belonging and blending religious language with national motifs.

- Does this card suggest harmony or tension between religious and civic belonging?
- How might this card reflect a lived interpretation of "dina d'malchuta dina"?



Early 20th-century Rosh Hashanah card

[The Gross Family Collection](#)

Translation from Yiddish:

Left flag:

Angels in all heavens unite!

We demand: 120 happy years

Amnesty for all sins

Right flag:

Angels in all heavens...

We demand 75,000...

Bottom text box:

We raise the flags to the skies

And call to you: "Brothers, be prepared

To demand your due from God

That He give you good fortune and happiness."

Throughout Jewish history, participation in secular government was not unusual. Biblical figures such as Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah served within foreign political systems while maintaining their Jewish identity and supporting the Jewish community. In later periods, leaders such as Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi under Roman rule, Maimonides in Egypt, and Rabbi Isaac Abravanel in Portugal maintained relationships with ruling powers that helped protect or sustain Jewish communities. These examples suggest that engagement with secular authority was often a practical and sometimes necessary component of Jewish communal survival and continuity.

- How might the participation of these figures reflect the implementation of "dina d'malchuta dina"?
- Does participation in government strengthen Jewish communities, create vulnerability, or both?