

Robbie Gringras & Abi Dauber Sterne

IT'S BEEN A YEAR

War Stories 2



FOR THE SAKE
OF ARGUMENT

FORTHESAKEOFGARGUMENT.ORG

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Intro	03
Her Legacy	05
My Enemy's Enemy is Not My Friend	12
The Story of Dina	19
The Kick Under the Table	30

INTRO

It's Been a Year: War Stories 2 is our ongoing attempt to help people talk and learn about what happened this past year. Core to our belief and to our educational approach is that arguments, done right, have the potential to make us smarter and bring us closer. Our hope in writing these particular stories – along with the first collection of stories since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 – is to help individuals and groups, classrooms and college greens, camp bunks and youth movements, engage with some of the most difficult, confusing and contentious issues relating to the war.

As with all our stories, they are intended to be read aloud with others present. When finished reading, we recommend choosing one of the questions, and ask each person to offer her opinion, with a qualification of how certain she is of that opinion. For example, “I agree with X, and I’m 87% certain of that opinion.”

After everyone has gone around sharing their initial thoughts, then begin to explore why people think what they think. Ask what makes them certain and what gives them pause about their own opinions.

And, most importantly, remember, these stories are not intended to spark debates in which one person must convince the other. Nor are they intended to create a negotiation, in which a decision has to be reached. But, rather, these stories are intended to create a healthy argument, in which each participant learns something new. He may learn something new about his friend or colleague. She may learn something new about Israel, or he may learn something new about himself.

INTRO

For more tools on how to have a healthy argument, visit
<https://www.forthesakeofargument.org/resources>

As always, we're really interested to hear about how you use our stories, in what ways you found them challenging and in what ways they were helpful. Please write to us at abi@forthesakeofargument.org and robbie@forthesakeofargument.org.

May the curses of this year come to end, and may the New Year bring with it abundant blessings.

Abi and Robbie

HER LEGACY

As the war between Gaza and Israel rages on, two Israeli friends confront their own changing views about whether or not to provide humanitarian aid to Gazan civilians.

HER LEGACY



HER LEGACY

The last few months have been the hardest I've ever experienced. The murder of so many people that I know. The constant uncertainty of how it will all end. I'm even uncertain about my own ideas and ideals, about who I am.

I've always been on the Israeli left. I'm not a pacifist; I know that sometimes war is unavoidable. But I also deeply believe that we're all human beings, and that Jews and Palestinians are destined to live together in this land. My entire adult life has been dedicated to putting as much effort into peace-making as Israel's establishment puts into war-making. It is who I am. At least, that's who I thought I was before I got an unexpected phone call from an old friend.

"Hi, Yoav. How are you doing?" It was Meirav calling me, asking me the unanswerable question.

"Um. You know. Like the rest of us," was all I could muster.

"Well, I've got an idea. Something we can actually do." I heard Meirav saying.

"I'm listening."

"You know we used to help get medical treatment to Gazans before the war? Well, I think we can start something up again. Not medicine this time. Food."

"Food." I responded with a half statement, half question.

"Yes, food. We know that Gazans are starving, and they need our help. They need food, and we can get it to them. I've been looking into it, and some of our old contacts in Gaza are still alive. They can help with distribution."

"Isn't the army dealing with that now? After all the international pressure?"

HER LEGACY

I asked, mostly trying to get out of the conversation.

“Well, yes, to an extent, but more food is always needed. Especially if the fighting ends, the pressure for aid will drop, and we’ll need to be already operating in the field to take up the slack. Just think, between the two of us, we can make things happen. I’ve already got donors lined up, and with your logistics head, we can really make a difference.” Meirav rattled on.

“I hear you,” I said, trying to make sense of my own feelings. Why wasn’t I jumping at this opportunity? Until a few months ago, I would have been leading this initiative.

“I was thinking we might even give it a symbolic name. Maybe name it after...after...our old friend?” I winced. Meirav knew better than to name her. We’d hardly talked about her since she was burned alive by the Hamas invaders. She’d been our inspiration. A woman with the most beatific smile and unending optimism. Peace was her middle name. And she was gone. Murdered by people whose families she’d spent her life trying to help.

Meirav was still talking, but I hadn’t been listening. “We would continue, maybe, continue her legacy, keep going like she would have wanted.” Meirav started to get excited.

“Um. Hmm. Her legacy.” I said haltingly, “What if she was wrong, though? What if it was her open heart that led to all this?” I meant that led to her murder, but I couldn’t say the word.

“I don’t understand what you’re saying. Hamas jihadists didn’t attack because we sent medicine to Gazan civilians. The two things aren’t connected. We can’t let hundreds of thousands of innocents starve because of the Hamas murderers on one side and our bombers on the other,” Meirav replied, starting to sound exasperated.

HER LEGACY

“Yes, of course. But, I mean...” I couldn’t believe that I was even having these thoughts, let alone that I was going to say this out loud. But I couldn’t help it, after what I had seen on October 7.

“I have no idea who is innocent anymore. Those Hamasnikim who broke into our kibbutz, they knew their way around, Meirav. They knew where the dining room was and where the kindergarten was. They knew where our friends lived.” I almost choked up. Took a deep breath, and continued, “So maybe the people we helped didn’t actually do the attack, but those Hamasnikim got their intelligence from someone. The people we helped, the people our friends helped. They were the ones who actually helped Hamas massacre us and destroy our homes.” I swallowed. “I don’t know if I want to feed these people.”

I paused. There was a shocked silence on the other end of the line, which I kind of shared. I was shocked to hear what I had said myself. “Sorry, Meirav. I just don’t know. I’m not sure I know anything any more.”

Meirav took a breath. Her voice was gentle, but firm. “Three year-old Gazan children did not attack us on October 7th. 80 year-old Gazans in wheelchairs didn’t attack us on October 7th. Unborn babies and their pregnant mothers did not attack us on October 7th. Just because there are monsters in the world, doesn’t mean we need to turn into monsters too. That’s what we always believed. That’s what our friends always believed. It’s crushing that we’ve lost our friends. We can’t lose their ideals too.”

I was quiet. The world had turned upside down, and I couldn’t figure out what was right anymore.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

"Just because there are monsters in the world, doesn't mean we need to turn into monsters too. That's what we always believed. That's what our friends always believed. It's crushing that we've lost our friends. We can't lose their ideals too."

- Do you agree with Meirav that the moral demand of humanitarian aid has not changed in the light of the Hamas attack, or do you share Yoav's hesitation?
- Is it counterproductive, or even hypocritical, to provide food to the people one is at war with? Or is it the right thing to do?

BACKGROUND

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel. They attacked Israel, by primarily targeting the area close to the Israeli-Gazan border, known as the Gaza Envelope. Many of the kibbutzim were founded and inhabited by Israeli "peaceniks." These were Israelis who, predominantly, believed in the ability of Israelis and Palestinians to achieve peace. These were Israelis who, for many years, worked to create bridge-building and peace initiatives with their Palestinian neighbors.

Before the war, there were initiatives that helped Gazans get medical care in Israel. There were initiatives that sought to build bridges, specifically between women. During the war, although the Israeli Defense Forces report providing food to Gaza, international bodies pressure for greater quantities and frequency. Israeli human rights organizations opened a case in the Israeli Supreme Court requesting additional food be made available to Gazans especially during the war, while at the same time other Israeli

HER LEGACY

groups worked to prevent any of this aid from entering Gaza and “aiding our enemies.”

In August 2024, a group of activists opened a food distribution center in Khan Younis and named it the “Vivian Silver Food Center,” after the Israeli peace activist who was murdered by Hamas on October 7 in Kibbutz Be’eri. Her son was quoted saying, “I’d rather that my mother’s name help the children of Gaza than her name being waved on a missile that kills them.”

Others, however, are outraged at such initiatives, as all Gazans are seen as collaborators with Hamas. Some of those who lost friends and loved ones on October 7 were betrayed by Gazan workers who reported to Hamas the exact location and layout of the kibbutzim that were attacked. Other Gazan civilians entered into Israeli territories after the attacks and looted the kibbutzim. Some former “peaceniks” now question their own beliefs, while others continue to hold out hope and continue to build humanitarian initiatives.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- (When) Are acts that restore faith in humanity worth the risk of helping the enemy?
- Have you found any of your deepest values challenged in the past year? If so, in what way?

My
ENEMY'S
ENEMY IS
NOT MY
FRIEND

A young man can't decide how to treat an anti-immigration
Islamophobe who shows great solidarity with Israel.

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY IS NOT MY FRIEND



He sauntered up to me before going inside.

“Well done,” he said in that smarmy English accent, “I think you are absolutely right. I am with you in your fight.”

He reached out his hand for me to shake. I looked down at his hand, and up at his all-too-familiar face. Everyone around looked to see my response.

I hadn’t expected this. I was standing demonstrating outside the venue for the huge televised debate “Is Anti-Zionism Anti-Semitism?” I didn’t care about the theories, I just wanted to help get Yinon out. My cousin has been kidnapped in Gaza since October 7th, and I was taking any opportunity that presented itself to draw attention to his situation. So there I was, holding a poster of his face, while across the entrance to the debate venue was a loud hostile crowd of pro-Palestinian protestors.

And here he was offering me his hand in sight of everyone.

My head and heart did not know what to do with themselves. My heart had been heavy all day. The overwhelmingly hostile responses I’d been receiving all day just for holding a kidnapped poster had gotten to me. This simple experience of someone walking up to me with a smile and a kind word threatened to move me to tears. But my head knew that this wasn’t just anyone, this was him.

He’s one of those dark web right-wing “intellectuals,” who uses long words and fluid eloquence to hide his racism. Up until October 7th he had spent most of his hot air arguing for Nationalism, anti-immigration, and Islamophobia.

Worse than that, he talked too much about Nazism in a blasé kind of

way. "I see no reason," he once drawled, "why every other country in the world should be prevented from feeling pride in itself because the Germans mucked up twice in a century." It was the faux-casual use of the phrase "mucked up" that got my goat. Two World Wars and the Holocaust were shrugged off like a child's mistake in a spelling test.

And this awful man, this racist and holocaust minimizer, was suddenly offering me support? Who wants support from someone like him? And why would I want everyone to see me accepting this support?

His hand remained in the air before me as my mind continued to race towards an inner conflict.

Yet who am I to give up on support from anyone? Israel now stands more isolated than ever. I'm standing holding the poster of my cousin who was taken hostage on October 7th, and people are spitting at me. My friends with whom I marched days on end for George Floyd won't speak to me. I'm even being accused of using the poster of Yinon to encourage genocide of Palestinians. And this is from people who were my total progressive allies only a few weeks before.

None of my friends have sought me out to shake my hand. Forget shake my hand – no one has even asked me how I'm feeling. It's been months since Yinon was taken. Months since Hamas rampaged through the kibbutz where I used to spend childhood summers, where my extended family lived. The rejection, the cold-hearted hostility, and their disdain for my tears have left me bewildered.

And here is a man who is showing solidarity. A man who is now all over the net and the news, arguing Israel's case. He's on our side!

But I don't want him on our side.

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY IS NOT MY FRIEND

All these thoughts speed through my brain at warp speed as he stands there frozen in time. Should I shake his hand? Turn my back? What signal will I send to him and to all those staring at me?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Should the narrator shake the outstretched hand?
- Would you accept help from people who have other views that you find abhorrent?

BACKGROUND

While the characters in this story are fictional, the quotation, “I see no reason why every other country in the world should be prevented from feeling pride in itself because the Germans mucked up twice in a century,” was stated by Douglas Murray, a political commentator and editor of the British publication, *The Spectator*. His outspoken views on Muslim immigration to Europe, and his proud support of a (non-Nazi) understanding of Nationalism placed him beyond the pale of many progressives and many Jews.

Since October 7, 2023, however, Murray has become one of Israel’s most prominent supporters. He is sharp and clear in his condemnation of Hamas and of what he sees as blatant antisemitism. He spoke recently in the Munk Debate on Anti-Zionism, arguing that Anti-Zionism is antisemitism.

October 7th has been seen as a watershed not only in the turmoil of the Middle East, but also in discourse throughout the West. Good versus Evil has suddenly become clear, and all have been sorted according to black or white. This has left many surprised at the “side” they appear to have been placed. Those who have seen themselves as “progressive” suddenly find themselves judged repressive. Jews who are critical of Israel’s conduct of war find themselves judged antisemitic by some

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY IS NOT MY FRIEND

Israel supporters, and some known racists suddenly embrace the Israeli cause. In these disorienting times many find themselves embodying internal and external ideological contradictions.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- Does the challenge of the narrator remind you of a real life situation you have found yourself in? How did you handle it? How did it leave you feeling?
- Are there some people whose support you would reject? Why? Why not?

THE STORY OF DINA

This story is taken verbatim from the book of Genesis.

Jacob and his tribe settle in the land, close by the nearest city-state, Shechem. Jacob's daughter, Dina, is taken captive and violated by a foreign man. Her brothers want to avenge her honor, while her father fears how other enemies will view him and his family.

THE STORY OF DINA



בראשית ל"ד – Genesis 34

1. וַתֵּצֵא דִינָה בַת-לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר לְדֹה לַעֲקֹב לְרֹאֹת בְּבִנּוֹת הָאָרֶץ: Now Dina, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land.
2. וַיַּרְא אָתָּה שְׁכָם בֶן-חַמּוֹר הַחֲצִיעִי וְשְׁרִיא הָאָרֶץ וַיַּקְרֵחַ אֶתְּהָ וַיַּשְׁכַּב אֶתְּהָ וַיַּעֲבֹד: Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her and violated her.
3. וַיַּדְבֵּק נִפְשָׁׁו בְּדִינָה בַת-יְעָקֹב וַיַּאֱהֵב אֶת-הַנְּעָר וַיַּדְבֵּר עַל-לִבְּ הַנְּعָר: Being strongly drawn to Dina, daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly.
4. וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁכָם אֶל-חַמּוֹר אָבִיו לְאָמֶר קָח-לִי אֶת-הַיְלָדָה הַזֹּאת לְאָשָׁה: So Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as a wife.”
5. וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טָמֵא אֶת-דִינָה בְּתוֹן וְכֹנְיוֹ הִיו אֶת-מִקְנָהו בְּשְׁדָה וְחַרְשָׁ שְׁכָם עַד-בָּאָם: Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dina; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home.
6. וַיֵּצֵא חַמּוֹר אֶבֶן-שְׁכָם אֶל-יְעָקֹב לְדֹבֵר אֹתוֹ: Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him.
7. וְבָנָי יְעָקֹב בָּאוּ מִזְמַשְׁדָה כְּשַׁמְעָם וַיַּתְעַצְּבּוּ הָאָנָשִׁים וַיִּתְהַרְּלֵם מִן-מִזְבֵּחַ וְעַשְׂהָ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְשַׁכֵּב אֶת-בָּת-יְעָקֹב וְכֵן לֹא יַעֲשֵׂה: Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an

outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done.

וַיֹּאמֶר חָמָר לְאַתֶּם לְאמֹר נְשָׁמָם בֶּן-חִשְׁקָה נִפְשָׁר בְּבָתָיכֶם תָּנוּ נָא אָתָּה לְאַשְׁהָ:

And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage.

9. וְהַתְּחַתֵּן אֶתְנוּ בָנָתֵיכֶם תִּתְנוּ לָנוּ וְאֶת-בָנָתֵינוּ תִּקְחַן לָכֶם:
Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves:

וַיֹּאמֶר שֵׁכֶם אֶל-אָבִיה וְאֶל-אֶחָיו אָמַצָּעַת בְּעִינֵיכֶם וְאַשְׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלִי אַתֶּן:

Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me.

הרבו עלי מאד מנהר ומתקן ואתננה כאשר תאמירן אליהם והנול אט-הנער לאשה:
Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what
you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife."

13. **ויענו בנו-יעקב את-שכם ואת-חמור אביו במרמה יידברו אשר טמא את דינה אתם:**

Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dina—

14. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לֹא נִכְלַל לְעֵשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְמַתָּא אַתְּ אֶחֱתָנוּ לְאַיִשׁ אֲשֶׁר-לָן
ערלה פִּיכְרָה הַזֶּה לְנֶן:

and said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us.

15. **אִרְבָּצָת בָּאֹת לְכֶם אֶם תָּהִי כְּמָנוּ לְהִמְלֹל לְכֶם כָּל-זָכָר:**
Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised.

16. **וְנִתְּנוּ אֶת-בָּנָתֵינוּ לְכֶם וְאֶת-בָּנָתֵיכֶם נִקְחָ-לָנוּ וְיִשְׁבְּנוּ אֶתְכֶם וְהִיָּנוּ לְעַם אֶחָד:**
Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred.

17. **וְאַם-לֹא תָשִׁמְעוּ אֵלָינוּ לְהִמְלֹל וְלִקְחַנוּ אֶת-בָּתֵּנוּ וְהַלְכָנוּ:**
But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go."

18. **וַיַּטְבּוּ דִבְרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חָמֹר וּבְעֵינֵי שָׁכָם בְּעֵינֵי חָמֹר:**
Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem.

19. **וְלֹא-אָחָר הַנּוּר לְעַשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ בְּבַת-יַעֲקֹב וְהִיא נִכְבֵּד מְלֵל בֵּית אָבִיו:**
And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father's house.

20. **וַיָּבֹא חָמֹר וּשָׁכָם בְּנֵו אֶל-שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיֹּדְבְּרוּ אֶל-אֲנָשִׁי עִירָם לְאמֹר:**
So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their town council, saying,

21. **הָאָנָשִׁים הַאֲלָה שְׁלָמִים גַּם אָתְּנוּ וַיֵּשְׁבָּו בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּסְחְרוּ אֶתְהָ וְהָאָרֶץ הַנָּהָר
רְחַבְתִּידִים לְפָנֵיכֶם אֶת-בָּנָתֶם נִקְחָ-לָנוּ לְנָשָׁם וְאֶת-בָּנָתֵיכֶם נִתְּנוּ לְהַמְלֹל:**
"These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move

about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them.

22. אִרְבָּזָת יְאֹתוֹ לְנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשָׁבַת אֲתָנוּ לְהִזְׁתָּעַם אֶחָד בְּהַמּוֹל לְנוּ כָּל-זָכָר
פָּאַנְשָׁר הַם נְמַלִּים:

But only on this condition will their representatives agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised.

23. מִקְנָהֵם וְקִנְגָּם וְכָל-בָּהָמָתָם הַלֹּא לְנוּ הַם אָרְבָּזָת הַלֹּא לְהָם וְשָׁבָנוּ אֶתְּנוּ:
Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us."

וַיִּשְׁמַעוּ אֶל-חָמוֹר וְאֶל-שֵׁכֶם בְּמִן כָּל-זָכָר שַׁעַר עִירָן וַיִּמְלֹא כָּל-זָכָר כָּל-זָכָר שַׁעַר
עירָן:

All his fellow townsmen heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all his fellow townsmen, were circumcised.

וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְׁלִישִׁי בְּהִזְׁתָּעַם כָּאַבָּם וַיִּקְחָה שְׁנִי-בָנֵי-עַקְבָּן שְׁמָעָן וְלוּ אֶחָד דִּינָה
אַיִשׁ מְרֻבָּו וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל-קָרְעֵר בְּطַח וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל-זָכָר:

On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dina, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males.

וְאֶת-חָמוֹר וְאֶת-שֵׁכֶם בְּמִן הַרְגָּנוּ לְפִי-חָרְבָּם וַיִּקְחָה אֶת-דִּינָה מִבֵּית שֵׁכֶם וַיַּצְאָה:
They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dina out of Shechem's house, and went away.

בְּנִי יְעַקְּבָּן בָּאוּ עַל-הַמְּלִילִים וַיַּבְּזֹהַב עִיר אַנְשָׁר טָמֵא וְאַחֲזָתָם:

The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled.

28. אֶת-צָאןָם וְאֶת-בָּקָרָם וְאֶת-חַמְרִים וְאֶת-אֲשֶׁר-בָּעֵיר וְאֶת-אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׂדָה לְקַחְוּ:
They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside;

29. וְאֶת-כָּל-חַיִּים וְאֶת-כָּל-טָפֵם וְאֶת-נְשִׁים שְׁבָן וִיבָּזָן וְאֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר בְּבָתִּים:
all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty.

30. וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל-לְוִי עֲכַרְתֶּם אֶתְ' לְהַבָּא יִשְׁנֵן בְּיַשְׁבֵּת הָאָרֶץ בְּקָנָעֵן
וּבְפְּרִזְזֵי וְאַנְּיִ מְתַנֵּ מִסְּפֵר וְנִאֲסֵף עַלְיָהָכֹתִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אַנְּיִ בְּיִתְיִ:
Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my fighters are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed.”

31. וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכֹּזְנֶה יִעַשְׂה אֶת-אֶחָתֵינוּ: (פ)
But they answered, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?”

BRIEF SUMMARY

Dina, daughter of Jacob, is raped and kidnapped by the Prince of Shechem. He and his father, Hamor, petition Jacob for the right to marry her. Jacob is silent. Hamor and Shechem suggest a deal, whereby Dina (still held hostage) would marry Shechem and all of Jacob's tribe can intermarry and trade with the city-state of Shechem.

Dina's enraged brothers feign calm, and insist that all the males in Shechem undergo circumcision in order to seal the deal. The men of Shechem agree to undergo circumcision, and on the third day after the mass operations, when they are at their weakest, Shimon and Levi rampage through the city to avenge their sister's honor. They rescue Dina and slaughter all the men of the city. They take all the women and children for slaves, pillage the whole city, taking property and livestock.

Jacob is horrified at the damage done to his reputation and fears that his small tribe is now in danger from surrounding enemies. The brothers are, however, unrepentant, asking rhetorically "Should we let him turn our sister into a whore?" The chapter ends with this question hanging in the air.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Were the brothers right to conduct the attack, or should Jacob have accepted the peace deal suggested by Hamor? (For the sake of this discussion, we suggest putting aside the way the brothers exploited a holy ritual in insisting on circumcision.)
- (How) Does this text and its questions remind you of present-day real life situations?

BACKGROUND

On the morning of October 7th, Hamas forces invaded the South of Israel. They attacked military bases and civilian towns, kibbutzim, and a large open-air music festival. They massacred over a thousand people, tortured and raped their way through the area, and kidnapped over 200 hostages to Gaza. Rumors are that the young women held hostage in Gaza have been victims of ongoing sexual assault while in captivity.

Israel's response to such devastation has been unprecedented in its force and determination. In the face of global condemnation, the IDF has attacked Hamas strongholds throughout Gaza, destroying civilian infrastructure and killing thousands of civilians as well as Hamas operatives. Statistics are difficult to verify at this moment, but even going by IDF numbers, while some 17,000 Hamas combatants have been killed by the end of August 2024, so too have at least the same number of civilians, the majority of whom are women and children.

There are Israelis who are deeply disturbed by the devastation in

Gaza, while there are also many who are unconcerned or even grimly satisfied. Very few express any desire for the death of Gazan innocents, but many doubt the “innocence” of Gazan civilians. Many Israelis view the Gazan civilian casualties as the inevitable result of Hamas’ attack and Hamas’ carelessness for its own civilians’ protection.

In late December 2023, South Africa filed its case with the International Court of Justice. It alleged that Israel was breaching the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in its military assault on Gaza. As part of its case, which was not upheld, they referred to comments by Israeli leaders and military commanders as evidence of “genocidal intent.”

One such comment was drawn from a video on social media, where Yair Ben David, a commander in the 9208th Battalion, said that they had “entered Beit Hanoun and did there as Shimon and Levi did in Nablus,” [Nablus is the Arab name for Shechem]. “The entire Gaza should resemble Beit Hanoun,” he added, referring to the ruined city in northern Gaza.

We can also look to our traditional sources for commentary on this biblical story. Maimonides, known as the Rambam, writing in the 12th century (*Hilchot Melachim* 9:14), asked why it was justified for all the men of Shechem to be put to death, when it was only the Prince who had done wrong? His answer is telling in the current context. He suggests that since the rape and kidnapping had been witnessed by all in the city, yet none of the people of Shechem had put the Prince on trial, they were as guilty of the crime as he was. The civilians were implicated in the crimes of their leaders.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- How do you feel about direct comparisons between the story of Shechem and the 2023-24 war in Gaza?
- In times of war, (when) are civilians implicated by their leadership? And by extension, (when) should civilians be treated differently than their military leadership?

THE KICK UNDER THE TABLE

A couple bicker over whether or not to discuss the ethics of warfare with their nephew, who is currently serving in the army.

THE KICK UNDER THE TABLE



“Ow!”

Sigal had never kicked me so hard. Before I could say anything else, her eyes caught me in their death grip. She was furious. Which was strange, since she was the one who had kicked me. I looked around the table, seeing everyone looking at me quizzically, and smiled at them through the pain. I looked back to Sigal and her burning eyes. It must have been something I said.

“Uri, will you help me with something in the kitchen?” cooed my angelic wife, who had just nearly broken my shin. I followed her. Limping.

Despite the pain, I knew I must have been in the wrong. Sigal was swift to explain.

“What the hell are you doing? I told you not to get into politics here. Didn’t I tell you? What got you started on all your war crimes theory and all your “innocents in asymmetric warfare?” Who cares what some Professor Halbertal has to say?”

“It’s not political,” I replied while rubbing my leg, “It’s just a conversation about how to protect civilians in an urban war. It’s Philosophy. Morality, if you like.”

“I don’t like. You don’t talk philosophy and morality to someone who is about to go back into Gaza.”

I stared at her. Of course. I’d completely forgotten. I’d wondered why Amir had been so quiet this evening. He’d been released from reserve duty last month after 90 solid days fighting in Gaza, and he’d just been called back. Poor kid. He was due a promotion at work, but just before moving to his new office the war broke out, and he’s been fighting pretty much ever since. There I was mouthing off about how the IDF

must take special care to avoid harming Gazan civilians, while he was listening...

I realized that words were to be of no help to me. But before I knew it, my mouth had already opened again:

“Why not? Why shouldn’t we talk morality to a soldier going into a war zone? Isn’t that exactly the time we should be reminding them of right and wrong?”

Sigal checked that no one was listening, and then hissed at me in fury, “Do you want him to die there? Is that what you want? You know as well as I do that Hamas don’t wear uniforms. They dress just like the locals, and they come at you from civilian houses. You want Amir to be careful? You want him to check carefully before shooting at someone coming towards him?”

“Yes, I do. I want our soldiers to be better than them. Our soldiers even shot three escaped hostages because they were just shooting at anyone. How many other innocent civilians have we killed like that? It’s madness.”

“Then you want him dead. Hamas isn’t going to wait for Amir to ask his conscience or to consult with “Uncle Uri in his head.” It’s not about right or wrong, it’s about life or death. While Amir thinks, Hamas shoots.”

I didn’t know what to say.

“We’re going back in there, and you are going to change the subject and never return to it. Got it?”

I nodded silently, but my mouth and I weren’t fully convinced.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with Dina, that Uri should be quiet?
- When, if ever, is the right time to discuss this with soldiers?
- How can morality be balanced with self-protection during war?

BACKGROUND

The war in Gaza is another dreadful example of how the rules of war struggle to address asymmetric conflict taking place in urban areas.

The rules of war, codified in the First Geneva Convention of 1864 and onwards, insists that all parties protect those not fighting, as well as those no longer able to. All efforts must be made to avoid harming civilians or destroying things essential for their survival.

Yet Hamas is notorious for attacking Israelis from within civilian populations, for operating from military tunnels underneath civilian cities, and for fighting without a uniform that would differentiate the fighter from the civilian. During street fighting from building to building, this makes it extremely difficult for an Israeli soldier to distinguish between a Palestinian who is a mortal threat and one who is an innocent civilian. A moment's hesitation can lead to death. Yet a moment's hesitation can also avoid death.

The enormous responsibility this places on the regular soldier is thoughtfully explored in this extract of a lecture by Prof. Moshe Halbertal.



THE KICK UNDER THE TABLE

The moral challenges are even greater in the current situation, where Hamas forces are specifically and deliberately attacking Israeli forces from among civilians. In order to take out these Hamas forces it would be impossible to avoid harming and killing the civilians among them. Should the IDF take extra care to avoid harming civilians (and in so doing, risk its own soldiers?), or should responsibility for the lives of the civilians be on those who deliberately put them in harm's way? Two pairs of military moral thinkers once argued about this kind of scenario in 2009, when this pattern of urban warfare in Gaza was already established. Their arguments are best read in full, but we can see that Michael Walzer and Avishai Margalit suggest that civilians are innocent -- no matter whether Palestinian or Israeli -- and so soldiers must always take utmost care to avoid their harm. Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin argue that this approach will encourage the use of human shields and always make it harder to fight such terrorists.

While few Israeli families refer to Walzer or Halbertal over their dinner tables (Uri would seem to be something of a nerd), fundamental questions of morality and survival underlie much discourse about a war to which Israel sends hundreds of thousands of its young people to fight.

'Israel & the Rules of War':
An Exchange



QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- Should we keep the rules when fighting with someone who breaks them?
- Should we care more about our soldiers than their civilians?



FOR THE SAKE
OF ARGUMENT

FORTHESAKEOFGUMENT.ORG