



Peace, War, and Torah: What Are We Asking For?

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What do we mean when we ask for peace, especially in a time of war, rising antisemitism, and deep uncertainty? In this episode of TEXTing IRL, Elana Stein Hain and Brandeis University professor Yehudah Mirsky explore the meaning of peace in Jewish thought through the priestly blessing in Parashat Naso. Drawing on Torah and contemporary reality, they unpack the difference between “negative” and “positive” peace and the tension between safety, stability, and human flourishing. The result is a more grounded and honest framework for thinking about peace today.

*This source sheet is part of the **May 25, 2026** episode of the podcast **TEXTing IRL - Ideas for Real Life**. Host **Elana Stein Hain** sits down with guests who are accomplished practitioners in their fields to explore how classic and modern Jewish texts can help us wrestle with and act with integrity in the face of the big dilemmas of our time.*

Elana Stein Hain is the Rosh Beit Midrash and a senior research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, where she serves as lead faculty and consults on the content of lay and professional programs.

A widely well-regarded thinker and teacher, Elana is passionate about bringing rabbinic thought into conversation with contemporary life. To this end, she hosts [TEXTing IRL](#), a bi-weekly podcast that considers issues relevant to Jewish life through the lens of classical and modern Torah texts; she also teaches [Talmud from the Balcony](#), an occasional learning seminar exposing the big ideas, questions, and issues motivating rabbinic discussions. Elana is the author of [Circumventing the Law: Rabbinic Perspectives on Legal Loopholes and Integrity](#) (Penn Press, 2024) which uses loopholes as a lens for understanding rabbinic views on law and ethics.

She earned her doctorate in Religion at Columbia University and is an alumna of the Yeshiva University Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS) as well as the Consortium in Jewish Studies and Legal Theory Graduate Fellowship at Cardozo School of Law. She also served for eight years as a clergy member on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, at both Lincoln Square Synagogue and the Jewish Center, has taught at the Wagner School at NYU, and sits on the board of Sefaria: A Living Library of Jewish Texts.

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Yehudah Mirsky is professor of Near Eastern and Judaic studies at Brandeis University and is on the faculty of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies. He teaches courses in Jewish political thought, theology and mysticism, the history of Zionism and the State of Israel, environmental ethics, and human rights. He is currently Inaugural Senior Fellow of the Weisfeld Maayan Centre for Sustainability and Jewish Ethics at Bar-Ilan University. He served for several years in the U.S. State Department's human rights bureau, and has written on religion, politics and culture for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *New Republic*, *The Economist*, *The Daily Beast*, *Guardian*, *Unherd*, *Ma'ariv*, *Haaretz*, and many other publications. He also was an aide to then-Senators Bob Kerrey and Al Gore.

His *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale, 2014) was awarded the Jewish Book Council's Choice Prize. It appeared in 2021 in a revised Hebrew edition as *Rav Kook: Mabat Hadash* (Kinneret) and was named by Haaretz as one of the 50 best books of 2021. The same year also saw the publication of his *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity: The Making of Rav Kook, 1865-1904* (Academic Studies Press). His current projects involve the relationships between liberalism, human rights, environmentalism, theology and nationalism.

An ordained rabbi, he was a chaplain with the Red Cross after 9-11. In Israel he was a fellow at the Van Leer Institute and Jewish People Policy Institute. Prof. Mirsky received his bachelor's degree at Yeshiva College, his law degree from Yale Law School, and his doctorate in the Study of Religion from Harvard University. He is a dual citizen of the US and Israel and is a long-time civil society and democracy activist in Jerusalem.

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1. Bamidbar (Numbers) 6:22-26

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה תְבָרְכוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמֹר לָהֶם:
יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:
יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְחַנְּךָ:
יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשֶּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:
וְשָׂמוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֶם:

God spoke to Moses:

Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them:

May God bless you and protect you!

May God deal kindly and graciously with you!

May God bestow favor upon you and grant you peace!

Thus they shall put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

2. Sifrei Bamidbar (Numbers) Naso 42:2

גְּדוֹל הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁאֵפְלוּ בְּשַׁעַת מְלַחְמָה צְרִיכִים שְׁלוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר כִּי־תִקְרַב אֶל־עִיר לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ וְקָרְאתָ אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם (דְּבָרִים כ: י), וְאֶשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים מִמִּדְבַּר קִדְמוֹת אֶל־סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ חֶשְׁבוֹן דַּבְּרֵי שְׁלוֹם לֵאמֹר (דְּבָרִים ב: כו).

Peace is so great that even when you are about to make war, you need peace, as it is said, “When you go towards a city to fight against it, you have to offer peace” (Devarim 20:10), “I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemot to Sichon, king of Cheshbon, with words of peace, saying” (Devarim 2:26).

גְּדוֹל הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁנֶּתַן לְעוֹשֵׂי תְשׁוּבָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בּוֹרָא נִיב שְׁפָתַיִם שְׁלוֹם לְרַחוּק וְלִקְרוֹב (ישעיהו נז: יט). גְּדוֹל הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁנֶּתַן בְּחֻלְקָם שֶׁל צְדִיקִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יָבוֹא שְׁלוֹם וְנוֹחוּ עַל־מִשְׁכְּבוֹתָם (ישעיהו נז: ב). גְּדוֹל הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁלֹּא נֶתַן בְּחֻלְקָם שֶׁל רָשָׁעִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אֵין שְׁלוֹם אֱמַר אֱלֹהֵי לְרָשָׁעִים (ישעיהו נז: כא).

Great is peace that it is given to those who repent, as it is said, “I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace, both for far and near” (Yeshayahu 57:19). Great is peace that it is the portion of the righteous, as it is said, “[The one who walked in uprightness] shall come to peace; they shall rest in their graves” (Yeshayahu 57:2). Great is peace that it is not the portion of the wicked, as it is said, “There will be no peace—says my God—for the wicked” (Yeshayahu 57:21).

3. Amidah prayer, Sim Shalom

שִׁים שְׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה חַן וְחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמָּךְ. בְּרַכְנוּ אֲבִינוּ כְּלָנוּ
כְּאַחַד בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ. כִּי בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ נִתְּתָ לָנוּ יְ-הוָה אֶ-לֵהֵינוּ תּוֹרַת חַיִּים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְיִצְדִּיקָה
וּבְרָכָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשְׁלוֹם. וְטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־עֵת וּבְכָל־שָׁעָה
בְּשְׁלוֹמְךָ :

Bring peace, goodness, and blessing, favor, kindness and compassion upon us and upon all Israel, Your people. Bless us, our Father, all of us as one with the light of Your countenance. For by the light of Your countenance You gave us the Lord our God, a Torah of life and the love of kindness, righteousness, blessing, compassion, life and peace. And may it be good in Your sight to bless Your people, Israel, at all times and at every moment with Your peace.

4. Mishnah Otkzin 3:12

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי, עֲתִיד הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְהַנְחִיל לְכָל צַדִּיק וְצַדִּיק שְׁלֹשׁ מְאוֹת
וְעֶשְׂרֵה עוֹלָמוֹת, שְׁנַאֲמַר (משלי ח), לְהַנְחִיל אֵהָבִי יֵשׁ וְאַצְרַתִּיהֶם אֲמַלֵּא. אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן
בֶּן חֶלְפַתָּא, לֹא מֵצֵא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּלִי מַחְזִיק בְּרָכָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלָּא הַשְּׁלוֹם, שְׁנַאֲמַר
(תהלים כט), ה' עוֹ לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן ה' יְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשְׁלוֹם :

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: In the world to come the Holy Blessed One will make each righteous person inherit three hundred and ten worlds, for it is written: "That I may cause those that love me to inherit *yesh* (numerical value 310); and that I may fill their treasures" (Mishlei 8:21). Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta said: the Holy Blessed One found no vessel that could contain blessing for Israel except peace, as it is written: "The Lord will give strength unto God's people; the Lord will bless God's people with peace" (Tehillim 29:11).

5. Abraham Isaac Kook, Olat Reiya 1, p. 330, trans. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy

אָמַר ר' אֶלְעָזָר תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים מְרַבִּים שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם, שְׁנַאֲמַר "וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי ה' וְרַב
שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵיךָ", אֵל תִּקְרֵי בְּנֵיךָ אֶלָּא בּוֹנֵיךָ. יֵשׁ טוֹעִים שְׁחוֹשְׁבִים, שֶׁהַשְּׁלוֹם הַעוֹלָמִי לֹא יִבְנֶה
כִּי אִם עַל יְדֵי צְבִיוֹן אֶחָד בְּדַעוֹת וּתְכוּנוֹת, וְאִם כֵּן כְּשֵׁרוֹאִים תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים חוֹקְרִים
בְּחֻקֵּיהֶם וְדַעַת תּוֹרָה, וְעַל יְדֵי הַמַּחְקֵר מִתְרַבֵּים הַצְּדִידִים וְהַשִּׁיטוֹת, חוֹשְׁבִים שֶׁבְּזֶה הֵם
גוֹרְמִים לְמַחְלָקַת וְהַפָּדָה הַשְּׁלוֹם. וּבְאַמֶּת אֵינוּ כֵּן, כִּי הַשְּׁלוֹם הַאֲמִתִּי אֵי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּבּוֹא
לְעוֹלָם כִּי-אִם דְּוָקָא עַל יְדֵי הַעֲרָךְ שֶׁל רַבּוּי הַשְּׁלוֹם. הַרְבּוּי שֶׁל הַשְּׁלוֹם הוּא, שֶׁיִּתְרָאוּ כָּל
הַצְּדִידִים וְכָל הַשִּׁיטוֹת, וְיִתְבָּרְרוּ אִידָּ כְּלָם יֵשׁ לָהֶם מְקוֹם, כָּל אֶחָד לְפִי עֲרָפוֹ, מְקוֹמוֹ וְעֵנְיָנוּ.
וְאִדְרָבָּא גַם הַעֲנִינִים הַנְּרָאִים כְּמִיתְרִים אוֹ כְּסוֹתְרִים, יִרְאוּ כְּשֶׁמִּתְגַּלֶּה אֲמִתּוֹת הַחֻקֵּיהֶם לְכָל
צְדִידָּהּ, שֶׁרַק עַל יְדֵי קִבּוּץ כָּל הַחֻלְקִים וְכָל הַפְּרֻטִים, וְכָל הַדַּעוֹת הַנְּרָאוֹת שׁוֹנוֹת, וְכָל
הַמְקַצְעַת הַחֻלּוּקִים, דְּוָקָא עַל יְדֵם יִרְאֶה אוֹר הַאֲמִתּוֹת וְהַצְּדִיק, וְדַעַת ד' יִרְאֶתוּ וְאַהֲבָתוּ,

וְאוֹר תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת. עַל-כֵּן תִּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים מְרַבִּים שְׁלוֹם, כִּי בְּמֵה שֶׁהֵם מְרַחֲבִים וּמְבַאֲרִים
וּמְיַלְדִים דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמָה חֲדָשִׁים, בְּפָנִים מְפָנִים שׁוֹנִים, שֵׁשׁ בָּהֶם רַבּוּי וְחִלּוּק עֲנִינִים, בְּזֶה הֵם
מְרַבִּים שְׁלוֹם.

R. Elazar said: The disciples of the wise increase peace in the world, as it says: *All your children shall be disciples of God, and great shall be the peace of your children [banayikh]*. (Isaiah 54:13) Read not *banayikh* [your children] but *bonayikh* [your builders]. Some err and think that world peace can only be built through total consensus in views and traits. When they see the disciples of the wise delving into wisdom and Torah knowledge, and through this activity producing a plethora of opinions and schools of thought, they believe that this causes conflict and the opposite of peace. But the truth is that real peace, on the contrary, can only come to the world through precisely *the multiplicity of peace*, and this is when *all* sides and opinions come to light, and are proven to each have their own place. In fact, even matters that seem superfluous and contradictory will be validated when the true wisdom is revealed in all its facets; for only through the marshalling of all the parts and details, all the seemingly divergent viewpoints, all the disparate fields of study, will the light of truth and justice come forth, the knowledge of God, the Divine wisdom and love, the light of the true Torah. Thus it is that the disciples of the wise increase peace, inasmuch as they expand, explain, generate new wisdom, in a multitude of facets containing numerous categories – in this they increase peace.