

All's Fair in Love and War

Rosh Hashanah 5763

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*Whoever wishes to master the art of war
must study it continuously.*

Said Frederick II

*You may not be interested in war,
but war is interested in you.*

Said Leon Trotsky

For by wise counsel thou shalt make war.

The Book of Proverbs.

Afghanistan has all but
dropped off the radar
and our periscope zeroes in on Iraq,
its digitalized terrain
displayed on the radar screen
of the war room
in the newly refurbished Pentagon,
Israel
is braced daily
for Columbine in her cafés
Oklahoma City in her open squares,
India and Pakistan
are in a nuclear stand off,
New York City plans
to remember
a year later
her day of terror,

but as for us,

All's Quiet on the Western...*coast*,

why should we need
to master the art of war?

An army officer once wrote
with unmasked animosity,
What do we do with the human side of war?
One solution is to ignore it.
It is, after all,
the most inscrutable part of our business.

*The human heart is slippery,
and it evades statistical reduction
and scientific analysis like a greased pig.
It is rude, erratic, often ridiculous,
and damned hard to quantify.
Better, in some ways to will it into nonexistence.
But like the tell tale heart of Edgar Allen Poe,
it returns unbidden into our counsels.
It will not be ignored.
It will humiliate any doctrine that does not give it due.*

Tonight we skulk into the
days of repentance,
our hearts,
our purple hearts on our sleeves,
all our longing and fear,
all our courage and cowardice
exposed to the scrutiny of
God's tribunal,

and the question is not,
What do we do with the human side of war,
but what do we do with the **war side**
of being human.

As we maneuver through the calendar,
lying in wait quietly
beneath our days,
under cover of holiday delicacies and din
lurks the stealthy ghost of war.

In our Sukkahs
with our paper chains and sing alongs,
we do not talk of what really happened in the desert,
the nation after nation with whom we warred,
the Amalekites

Midianites

Perrizites

Moabites

Canaanites

Hittites

Amorites

Jebusites

go team go
fight fight fights.

We spin tops
and tell a tale of oil,
 (war goes hand in hand with oil,
 but not always of the olive variety,)
and we don't dwell on the armor and elephants
of the Greco-Syrian warriors
who came down upon
the Maccabean revolutionists
hiding underground in
their dusty caves and tunnels,
gruesome tales of martyrdom
and Judith's beheading of the
enemy Commander in Chief,
all of which are very much a part of
our season of gelt and gifts.

We wave groggers and wear masks
act out the Purim story
but always leave out the last chapter of Esther
which describes our vicious preemptive strike.
It is written:

*"The King granted the Jews
to stand up for themselves,
to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate
any armed force.
And the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the capital."*

I love that last little innocuous verse,
"And the decree was proclaimed in Shushan,"
because when the Hebrew is revocalized,
it reads
"And the law was given with roses..."
And because of that silly little switch
Jews sometimes
sprinkle roses around the Torah for Shavuot.
I love how the rabbis take something
so dry as *"the decree was proclaimed in Shushan"*
and make a bouquet of roses.

At our *Pesach* tables
ten dots of red wine
reminds us of the bloodshed
of our oppressors.

Yom HaShoah
commemorates the victims of the Holocaust,

Tisha B'Av recalls exile
and the destruction of the Temple,

Yom Kippur is judgment day,
and we are held for ransom,
we pray for our very lives,

and on Rosh Hashanah,
which celebrates the birthday of the world,
we have to wonder,
God, You fashioned this world from chaos.
What are we to do
with this *thing*
You've factored into us, this war,
this savage soul?

We cannot ignore the human heart
when we talk about war,
And we cannot ignore war
when we talk about the human heart.

General Sherman
said *War is Hell*.

In the Christian concept of Hell
people suffer who deserve to suffer.
In war that is not always true.
In every war
people suffer who
deserve no such thing.

When we say war is hell,
we are saying that it is a criminal act.

But is all war criminal?
Thomas Aquinas asked in the thirteenth century,
“*Is it always a sin to wage war?*”

There is a concept of JUST WAR,
and by just war we mean of course
a war that is guided by justice, fairness, reason
not just war as in *merely* war,
as in “oh it's *just* war...”
I've always loved the phrase “just cause,”
because when a lawyer talks about just cause

she means exactly **the opposite**
of when you ask your teenager
why he took the car and he says
“*Just 'cause,*”
just 'cause I wanted to,
which is not at all having *just cause* to do something,
it's having **no cause**,
I'm **just** saying this,
(in which *just* means only,)
I'm **only** saying this
Just so we're straight,
(in which *just* means “*in order that,*”)
in order that we're straight,
that's *just* what it means,
(except when it means exactly
as in...that's *just* what it means,)
And there's the cold glass you asked for of *just ice*
as opposed to the cold metal scales of *justice*,
and I'm *just* about done,
(which means a brief preceding time
as in the sun *just* came up.)

Just war.

In the just war theory,
**warfare is justified as love's response
to the plight of the neighbor
threatened by force.**

Do not stand idle while your neighbor bleeds.

Three main things define a just war:
One's aims have to be crystal clear.
One has to have a reasonable hope of success.
Civilians should not be the subjects of direct attack.

War is always judged twice,
first for the reasons it was fought,
and secondly for the way it was fought.
**A war with just cause can be fought unjustly,
and a war with unjust cause can be fought justly.**

Over our ark in our Sanctuary,
and on every Temple Isaiah letterhead
it is written
tzedek tzedek tirdof,

Justice justice shall you pursue.
Why is justice repeated twice?
The rabbis suggest because we are commanded
to pursue justice justly.

A **JUST WAR** has the right intention,
is fought justly,
and uses battle only as the last resort.

There is another concept of war called **TOTAL WAR**.
A definitive thinker on war
Carl von Clausewitz
(You wouldn't believe how many authors on war
have the middle name *von*!)
he wrote
*"to introduce into the philosophy of war
a principle of moderation would be an absurdity.
War is an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds."*

There is no imaginable act
however treacherous or cruel
that falls outside of it.
Total war has no limit.

The rabbis asked why did the Israelites
have to put a mark on their doors in Egypt
so that the angel of death would pass over them?
Doesn't the angel of death know who lives where?
They answered, "Once the Angel of death and destruction
is released, it does not distinguish between the righteous
and the wicked."
It is the Angel of Total War.

It would be nice to believe today we have a just war.

In a **just war** one's aims have to be crystal clear.
But are our aims clear?
It seemed at first,
we had a clear enemy,
Bin Laden,
which turned into a network,
Al Qaeda,
which became an idea,
Terrorism,
which became
every nation that harbors

that idea
which became evil itself.

President Bush
said "*I told the nation more than once,
that ours is a war against evil.*"

In a **just war** one has to have a reasonable hope of success.
Destroy evil.
Is that reasonable?

In a **just war**
civilians should not be the subjects of direct attack.
We are contemplating an urban war in Iraq.

Terrorism
makes people feel fatally exposed.
It is often called unmilitary
because there is no battlefield.
There is no army.
Everybody is in it.
We may not be interested in war
but war is interested in us,
and we're left,
asking our unmilitary little question
 "*Why do they hate us?*"
And the "*they*" is less than specific,
and the "*us*" is anyone outside of
the unspecific "*they*".
In that regard,
terrorism is an invitation to **total war**.
Designed to elicit passionate response,
vengeful response,
instead of the careful art of strategy.

How do we master the art of this war?

Talmud teaches that all Biblical wars are mandatory,
and that these mandatory wars can be broken into three categories.

- 1) Joshua's war against the 7 Canaanite nations,
- 2) the war against Amalek,
- 3) and defensive wars.

Talmud goes on to explain that
there are no Canaanite nations any more,
nor does Amalek exist.

There exists no Holy Wars for us any longer.

The only mandatory war
left in Jewish law is defensive...
self-defense.

We not only have a moral right to defend,
but an obligation to defend.
Our proud symbol is the *Mogen David*,
the defensive Shield of David.

And should we have to fight that war,
there are numerous rules by which to abide.

In Deuteronomy it is written:
*You shall not destroy [an enemy's] trees
by forcing an axe against them...
for is the tree of the field a man
that it can flee from you?*

From this,
the sages conclude
immunity of the noncombatant.

They say
*just as a tree,
had it fled,
would not be chopped down,
so too a person were he to flee
should not be cut down.*

They go further to say that not only
should one spare one who is fleeing,
but one should provide opportunity for
people to flee.

Talmud teaches
*“When siege is laid to a city
it may not be surrounded on all four sides,
but only on three,
in order to give an opportunity for escape
to those who would flee to save their lives.”*

At least one military historian
called this tactic
hopelessly naïve.
How is it possible to surround a city on three sides?

But our sages didn't agree

that it was naïve.

One commentator, Abarbanel said,
“*If [the people in the besieged city] cannot [flee],
they will out of desperation
seek to avenge themselves before they die...
The opportunity to escape **saps the resolve**
of the besieged to continue fighting.*”

Naïve or not,
there is something extraordinarily
beautiful and honest,
life-affirming and hopeful
about providing people with the opportunity to flee.

In providing the enemy with an out,
we are providing ourselves with an out.
By allowing them to save themselves,
we are in fact saving ourselves
from becoming drawn into total war,
from moral implosion.
Freedom is a divine gift,
and by acknowledging the primal kinship
of humankind,
we protect our humanity.

It is becoming easier and easier to ignore
the human side of war.

It is much easier today to ignore the
flesh and blood of the bruisable human heart
than it was in the days of arrows and clubs.
Long range missiles of mass destruction
threaten to destroy millions
and so what is one slippery heart?

Fuller wrote:
*the more mechanical become the weapons
with which we fight,
the less mechanical must be the spirit
which controls them.*

In Machiavelli’s book *Orlando Furioso*
the brave knight holds a gun for the first time,
and he throws it into the ocean saying:

By Beelzebub's malicious art designed

*To ruin all the race of human kind...
Ne'er again a knight by thee may dare
Or dastard cowards by thy help in war
With vantage base assault a nobler foe
Here lie forever in the abyss below.*

Like that knight
we stand at a pinnacle point in history,
holding in our hand this new kind of war,
this war against terrorism,
yearning to toss it into the sea,
we, the *nobler foe*
and they, the *dastard cowards*,
but the knight who tossed it
was a noble but bloody fool,
because he should have studied it
and owned it.
Hate it, yes, but tame it.
Drowning it did not make it disappear.
The cat came back.

What we have is
no longer clearly a *just war*,
and not yet a *total war*,
and it won't disappear,
we have to tame it into a new definition
that we can master and know,
and take pride in, that is true to ourselves,
our American optimism, and
our Jewish faith in the messianic triumph
of life and goodness,

I'd like to suggest a new approach to war
different than *total war*,
an echelon above *just war*
which I call PEACE WAR.

Okay, I know that sounds moronic,
oxymoronic to be exact,
a peace war...
it's like jumbo shrimp,
or family vacation,
or temporary tax increase,
you have to forgive me
I'm from the land of oxymorons,
Connect-icut.

But consider the term peace war,
because peace *is* the goal of war,
and should be included in its definition,
**the reality of war has to be conditioned by
a vision of reconciliation.**

The vision shouldn't end with victory
and defeat.

It shouldn't end with "*we showed you.*"

Yitzhak Rabin once said:

*"I am going to continue to fight terrorism
as if there are no negotiations
and I am going to continue to negotiate
as if there is no terrorism."*

The key element of a *peace war*
would be building
and destroying at the same time.
Fighting and negotiating.

And to build does not mean
sprinkling dollar bills over a country
or teaching the enemy baseball.

And maybe it's hopelessly naïve,
like surrounding a city on only three sides,
or maybe it is
beautiful and honest,
life-affirming and hopeful.

In one Midrash explains
God commands Moses
with the words
*Every war upon which Israel enters
shall begin with an offer of peace.*

In every war there has to be the offer of peace,
the opportunity to flee from violence,
to stop,
to reconcile,
to repent,
and forgive.

Torah is filled with tales of ancient warfare.
It is a tactical field manual.
And yet we say, "All its paths are peace."

All of creation is based on separations,
day from night,
earth from Heaven,
land from sea,
woman from man,
a breaking apart,
all of creation is based on destructions.
All of sacredness is based on sacrifice.
War is not an end
as revenge is an end.
After we destroy a regime,
what are we planning to create?
War needs to be regarded
as a tool toward peace.

You know how when you are immersed in something,
everything seems to relate to it?
Reading about war,
I was on high alert,
I became really good at Minesweeper,
It meant something entirely different
to buy a shirt at Target.

I was sitting at a table,
a plate of *Heuvos O-groats* in front of me
and a stack of war books and manuals,
eating and highlighting,
the art of war,
the nuclear age,
Machiavelli's *The Prince*.
and next to me, jammed up against my table
was another table
where two men were talking about their
mutual friend,
and his relationship,
and I was trying not to listen,
but their table was I mean right there,

and I could not help but notice
that they were using all the same vocabulary
in discussing a relationship
that I was highlighting in my war books.
It was curious,
I'd read about how a troop takes advantage,
and they were talking about taking advantage,

I was reading about first strikes,
captives,
luring,
and they were using descriptive terms such as
striking,
captivating,
alluring,
even bombshell,
which made me laugh
as I thought,
well, women are from Venus,
planet named for the goddess of love,
and men are from Mars,
named for the god of war,
just ask the wives of Fort Bragg.

And if all's fair in love and war
why shouldn't they share language
the Hebrew word for weapon *neshek*
is a variation of the word for kiss *neshika*,

words leapt off my page
and infiltrated their discussion
her defenses,
his aggression,
her manipulation,
his deception,
provocative provocation,
and I drew my highlighter over the words
in my Marine Corps manual,
*"Any doctrine which attempts to reduce warfare
to ratios of forces,
weapons and equipment
neglects the impact of the human will
on the conduct of war and is inherently false,"*
And I was looking for human will
in war,
for the position of the human heart,
and they were speaking of
a warring couple,
and it was no more than noteworthy
at the time,
something curious,
the interplay of words over
the warm mist of coffee
and baskets of biscuits,

and I am sure I believed
that *their* topic was shallow and common
while *my* topic was deep and fantastic
as one author I read
told me
“**WAR IS LIFE LIVED LARGE,**”
when all at once
one of my neighbors said to his friend,
“And that is when she attempted suicide,”
and BANG.

Woman down.
Everything shifted.

And suddenly
everything on my table
became inherently false,
mine were merely texts
on *matters of the state*
and they were *stating what mattered.*
And here were *just* words
and there were *just* and *unjust wars*
with casualties
and war wasn't life lived large,
but LIFE was war fought hard.

Infantries are not nearly as vulnerable
as infancies.

We know we are not going to come out
of this life alive.
Life is life-threatening.

We do study war continuously.
But we have not mastered the art.
Because the supreme art of war
is not to fight. And we fight.

How do we master our savage soul?

Napoleon said that the whole secret of the
art of war lies in the ability to master
lines of communication.
How do we communicate?
God had said to Moses,
Every war upon which Israel enters

shall begin with an offer of peace.

Have we left any room in our fury
toward each other,
for an offering of peace,
for a humbling,
for a tempering
of our most wrathful tempers,

We are each like a city besieged,
tumultuous hearts, savage souls,
but God factored into us an escape,
a way to freedom
and peace,
and sanctity,

It is said that before God created the world,
God first created repentance,
because in order for the world to survive,
it needed to have a way to repair itself.

The world was surrounded on three sides,
and on the fourth,
the gate of repentance is flung wide open,
welcoming us to flee
into the arms of mercy.

Harry Truman claimed
that he never lost a night's sleep
over his decision to drop the atomic bomb.

We have to lose sleep.
Someone once said:
*"Jews can't sleep
and they won't let the world sleep."*

We have to lose sleep not only over
war on the grand scale,
where life is lived large.
We have to lose sleep over
life lived small,
over the little stumbles and spills
of our slippery, messy little hearts.

We are surrounded on all sides by
an army of days,
incessantly marching us forward,

and try as we may,
we cannot stop them,
we cannot slow them,
they march us toward the final frontier,
but every year,
there are ten,
the ten days of repentance,
that open a window for us
through which we can flee,
and run free,
throw off the yoke of mortality,
the burden of guilt,
the shame of irreverence,
cast off those hostile emotional forces
that batter us from within,
the only price is a
repentant spirit
and a contrite heart.

Rabbi Kook said,
*“Since there is no war without evil
there is no war that does not require penance.”*
And since there is no life that is without war,
there is no life that does not require penance.

And since freedom is a divine gift,
repent,
and be free,
forgive
and be free,

for it is inhumane to
besiege a city unto the death
of all inside,
and it is unjust
to besiege oneself with shame
unto the death of all that was pure inside,
and it is ungodly
to lay siege to your fellow,
to be unforgiving
and sap all resolve
not allowing the disheartened captive
release,

everything we do
has to be a path to peace.

Ask yourself,
you soldiers of life,
every time you speak,
every time you don't speak,
ask yourself
if this is a path to peace.
Ask yourself
every time you separate yourself
if it is a separation
for the sake of creation,
a sacrifice for the sake of sacredness,

ask yourself always,
am I like unto Torah,
are all my paths peace.
And if they are not,
make them so.

And you know how when you are immersed in something,
everything seems to relate to it?

**My husband and I
have discovered
the divide and conquer technique
of parenting two children.**

One morning
my husband took our baby Kinneret,
into the den
and I took our two and a half year old Rachmiel out,
he was antsy,
I wanted to read,
we walked to the McDonald's
a block from our house,
unfortunately,
our front yard
is incessantly pummeled
by Big Mac wrappers
and garbage
from that enemy of human health,
torn ketchup and relish packets
ensnared in our lavender shrubs
and rosemary ambushes,
but we went,
Rachmiel was eating

I was reading
the Transformation of War
Machievelli's The Prince,

And a large group of family and friends
from Guatamala
filled the three booths behind us.
they were clearly celebrating.

One said,

"Quien tiene el poder declarar la guerra?"

Who has the power

to declare war?

And everyone started guessing,

"El presidente?"

Who? Who?

"Congress."

Said the woman who was clearly the center of the celebration.

Congress! They cheered.

Of course, that's not entirely accurate anymore,

but just a few weeks ago

it was enough for this woman to pass her test.

And she then went on in heavily accented English,

"I put my hand on that Bible

and I said 'So help me God!'"

"Rachmiel," I suddenly said.

"Let's go. We have to do something."

"What we have to do mama?"

he asked scrambling out of the seat.

"Come on, I'll show you.

It's very important."

I took his hand

and we walked quickly to the corner store

and I bought a long stemmed red rose.

"I want that rose," he said.

We walked back into the McDonald's

and there was a quiet that came over everything.

It was as if the very presence of the rose

in that garish cube of a restaurant

commanded a reverence.

I knelt next to Rachmiel

and said,
“That lady over there just became a citizen.
And I want you to go and give her this rose.
Will you do that for me?”

Rachmiel nodded with giant eyes,
and he took the rose with great seriousness.

And while I remained crouched, hidden

behind a plasticine Ronald,

he walked across that red and yellow floor,

my two and a half year old trooper,

and anyone who knows my son

knows that he is shy

and untrusting

but he mustered all the courage he could
into his little tenth percentile legs,
and crossed that high gloss floor,
all eyes on him,
and when he held the rose up
to the woman
the three booths of friends and family,
the staff behind the counter,
the fry guys,
the people playing backgammon in the corner,
the police officer,
the boy with the mop,
all burst into applause,
and the woman took the rose
and tears sprung from her eyes
and she said,
“Thank you, thank you,”

and I prayed that she wouldn't
be tempted to reach out and tousle his hair,
because then that perfect moment
would be blown apart
with a terrible two's tantrum
but she didn't,

she just said thank you thank you and cried
and Rachmiel turned and ran into my arms
with a giant smile,
and I scooped him up
and I hurried out of there, telling him
“That was a big moment for you, kid,”

And the decree was proclaimed in Shushan.
The law was given with roses.

The Torah was once an army tank,
but today it is an ambulance of mercy
and all its path are peace
and it is given with roses.

And walking home
with his warm hand in mine,
the decision,
finally,
to shelve
Machiavelli's The Prince
in favor of DePury's
The Little Prince,

who had but one love
upon his little lonely planet,
a singular rose,
for whom he caught a shooting **star**
and traveled the universe
to protect her
from the Boabab trees,
to shield her from the winds,

and we wear a star,
a *mogen David*,
a shield,
because what can we do
with the war side of being human?
We can vow to protect,
our families,
our friends,
our happiness,
our home,
our roses,
and ourselves
from ourselves,

from the savagery
God sown into us from the start,
that's our objective,
to shield one another,
from every hurt,
from every wind,
from fear,
to guard
the citizens that share
our tiny lonely planet,
our little spot in space,
protect our planet,
our dreams,
our innocence,
our goodness,
shield each other
fan the divine spark in one another
gently
and with love
shield it from the storms
that inevitably come,
make offers of peace,
encourage flight,
repentance,
freedom,
to shield and protect
and yes the shield gets nicked
and dented,
a little bruised,
a little beat up,
but that is what we do,
we shield joy,
we protect vision,
keep safe divine sparks,
we guard hope,
dignity and liberty that are divine gifts,
we even protect God,
we shield God's Name
from abuse,
we protect the past
with long, long memory,
with a shield
made from a gleaming alloy
of optimism and realism,
bearing God's crest,
we shield our roses,

our law,
which was given with roses,
our promise of peace,
our paths to peace,
we are not going to be swords,
we are not going to be aggressors,
we are not wrathful,
in this war,
in this life,
we are protectors.
We are defenders.
We are the shield.

So help us God.