

Safeguarding Lives and Mending the World: A Jewish Response to Gun Violence Prevention

Jewish Values & Gun Violence Prevention: Which Jewish values best exemplify the goals of saving lives, reducing violence, and creating safer communities?

The Common Agenda:

HB 338 - mandates the reporting of lost and stolen guns.

- Lost or Stolen Gun Reporting requires gun owners to report the loss or theft of a firearm within three days of discovering the firearm is gone. This would reduce community violence by giving police an essential tracking tool to help them disrupt the flow of illegal guns into communities most susceptible to violence.

HB 714 - requires a background check for every gun sale.

- Requiring background checks on the private sales of long guns would close a loophole that currently allows individuals with a history of violence and those identified as potential threats to purchase military-style rifles — the weapon of choice for mass shootings — from a private/non-licensed seller without oversight.

HB 731 - requires the safe storage of firearms.

- Safe Storage legislation would require firearm owners to be responsible and securely store their weapons in the home when not in use. This has been shown to prevent school shootings, unintentional shootings, and suicides, especially by preventing children from accessing weapons.

HB 1018, which establishes extreme risk protection orders (red flag laws).

- This mechanism empowers family members and law enforcement to petition a judge to temporarily remove guns from a loved one in crisis, without subjecting them to an involuntary mental-health commitment. Nearly 80% of Pennsylvanians support the concept, and states have found massive reductions in suicides after enacting ERPO laws.

Application to Our Communities:

It is crucial that we apply the Jewish principles we identified to our own communities. This can be achieved by:

1. Education: Teaching our community members about the importance of gun safety and violence prevention.
2. Advocacy: Using our platforms to support policies that aim to reduce gun violence.
3. Action: Forming community task forces to address this issue locally and work towards solutions.

<https://www.ceasefirepa.org/>

<https://www.heedinggodscall.org/>

<https://rac.org/take-action/rac-your-state/rac-pa>

<https://diocesecpa.org/leadership-news/a-pastoral-letter-from-the-pennsylvania-bishops/>

"He who saves a single life, it is as if he has saved the entire world" (Sanhedrin 37a)



Gun Violence Prevention Text Reference Sheet

1. Why do you think lessening gun violence is a "Jewish" issue? How do these texts define what makes an issue of "Jewish" concern? And, at this time of year (the High Holidays), do you feel more particular or universal in outlook?

Pirkei Avot 1:14

(14) He [also] used to say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am for my own self [only], what am I? And if not now, when?

משנה אבות א'י"ד

(יד) הוא הָיָה אֹמֵר, אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וְכִשְׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אֵימָתָי:

Sifra, Kedoshim, Chapter 4 12

12) "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the children of your people": You may take revenge of and bear a grudge against others (idolators). **"And you shall love your neighbor as yourself": R. Akiva says: This is an all-embracing principle in the Torah. Ben Azzai says: (Bereshith 5:1) "This is the numeration of the generations of Adam" — This is an even greater principle.**

ספרא, קדושים, פרק ד י"ב

[יב] "לא תקם ולא תטר את בני עמך" – נוקם אתה ונוטר לעכו"ם. "ואהבת לרעך כמוך" – רבי עקיבא אומר זה כלל גדול בתורה. בן עזאי אומר "זה ספר תולדות אדם" – זה כלל גדול מזה.

When Mazon was being created, there was a debate about the tagline: should it be Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger or Mazon: A Response to Jewish Hunger. What is the difference, and which are you most comfortable with?

And where would you put the accent:

Jewish Community Relations Council or Jewish **Community Relations** Council?

Likutei Moharan 5:1:2

Nachman of Brostlav, Chasidut, early 19th c)
Now, each person must say: "The entire world was created only for my sake" (Sanhedrin 37a). Consequently, because the world was created for my sake, I must constantly look into and consider ways of making the world better; to provide what is missing in the world and pray on its behalf.

ליקוטי מוהר"ן ה'א'ב'

א כִּי צָרִיךְ כָּל אָדָם לֹמַר: כָּל הָעוֹלָם לֹא נִבְרָא אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבְלִי (סנהדרין לז). נִמְצָא, כְּשֶׁהָעוֹלָם נִבְרָא בְּשִׁבְלִי, צָרִיךְ אֲנִי לְרִאוֹת וּלְעֵין בְּכָל עֵת בְּתַקוּן הָעוֹלָם, וּלְמַלְאוֹת חֶסֶד וְחַסְדֵּי הָעוֹלָם, וּלְהַתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַבְרָתָם.

Torah Texts: How do these texts inform a Jewish view on Gun Violence Prevention?

Deuteronomy 22:1-8

(1) If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your peer. (2) If your fellow Israelite does not live near you or you do not know who [the owner] is, you shall bring it home and it shall remain with you until your peer claims it; then you shall give it back. (3) You shall do the same with that person's ass; you shall do the same with that person's garment; and so too shall you do with anything that your fellow Israelite loses and you find: you must not remain indifferent. (4) If you see your fellow Israelite's ass or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it; you must raise it together. (5) A woman must not put on man's apparel, nor shall a man wear woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is abhorrent to your God (6) יהוה. If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. (7) Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life. (8) When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone should fall from it.

Leviticus 19:16

(16) Do not deal basely with* *deal basely with Others* "go about as a talebearer among"; meaning of Heb. idiom *halakh rakhil be-uncertain*. members of your people. Do not profit by* *profit by* Lit. "stand upon"; precise meaning of Heb. idiom 'amad 'al uncertain. the blood of your fellow [Israelite]: I am יהוה.

דברים כ"ב:א'-ח'

(א) לֹא־תִרְאֶה אֶת־שׁוֹר אֶחָיִךְ אוֹ אֶת־שֵׂי
נֹדָחִים וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם הֲשִׁב תְּשִׁיבָם
לְאֶחָיִךְ: (ב) וְאִם־לֹא קָרֹב אֶחָיִךְ אֵלֶיךָ
וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּ וְאִסְפָּתוּ אֶל־תּוֹךְ בֵּיתְךָ וְהָיָה
עִמָּךְ עַד דָּרַשׁ אֶחָיִךְ אֹתוֹ וְהִשְׁבֹּתוּ לוֹ: (ג)
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְחֹמְרוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשֹׁמְלֹתָיו
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל־אֲבֹדֹת אֶחָיִךְ אֲשֶׁר־תֵּאָבֵד
מִמֶּנּוּ וּמִצָּאֲתָהּ לֹא תוּכַל
לְהִתְעַלֵּם: (ד) לֹא־תִרְאֶה
אֶת־חֹמֹר אֶחָיִךְ אוֹ שׁוֹרוֹ נִפְלָה בְּדָרְךָ
וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם הִקֵּם תִּקְיָם
עִמּוֹ: (ה) לֹא־יִהְיֶה כְּלִי־גִבּוֹר
עַל־אִשָּׁה וְלֹא־יִלְבַּשׁ גִּבּוֹר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה כִּי
תוֹעֵבֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל־עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶּה: (ו)
(ו) כִּי יִקְרָא* (בספרי תימו קו בקו"ף
גדולה און צפור ולפניך בדךך בְּכָל־עֵץ אוֹ
עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֶפְרָחִים אוֹ בִּיצִים וְהָאֵם
רֹבֵצַת עַל־הָאֶפְרָחִים אוֹ עַל־הַבִּיצִים
לֹא־תִקַּח הָאֵם עִל־הַבָּנִים: (ז) שְׁלַח
תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת־הָאֵם וְאֶת־הַבָּנִים תִּקַּח־לָךְ
לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ וְהִאֲרַכְתָּ יָמִים: (ח)
(ח) כִּי תִבְנֶה בַּיִת חָדָשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מַעֲקֵה
לְגַגְּךָ וְלֹא־תִשִּׂים דָּמִים בְּבֵיתְךָ כִּי־יִפֹּל
הַנֶּפֶל מִמֶּנּוּ:

ויקרא י"ט:ט"ז

(טז) לֹא־תִלְךָ רְכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ לֹא תַעֲמֹד
עַל־דָּם רַעַף אָנִי יְהוָה:

Rabbinic Texts on Gun Violence Prevention

How would you relate the Torah's principle of "You shall not bring blood on your house" to guns in a home today?

Please note, the Torah did not forbid the making of flat roofs, dogs or ladders: it forbade dangerous ones. Do you think that distinction applies to guns? Why or why not?

Bava Kamma 46a

Rabbi Natan says: From where is it derived that one may not raise a vicious dog in their house, and that one may not set up an unstable ladder in their home? As it is stated: "You shall not bring blood on your house" (Deuteronomy 22:8), which means that one may not allow a hazardous situation to remain in his house.

Mishneh Torah, Murderer and the Preservation of Life 11:4

(4) There is no difference between a roof or anything else that is dangerous and likely to cause death to a person who might stumble. If, for instance, one has a well or a pit in his courtyard — — he must build an enclosing ring ten handbreadths high, or put a cover over it, so that a person should not fall into it and die. So too, any obstruction that is a danger to life must be removed as a matter of positive duty and extremely necessary caution.

בבא קמא מ"ו א

ר' נתן אומר מניין שלא יגדל אדם כלב רע בתוך ביתו ואל יעמיד סולם רעוע בתוך ביתו שנאמר (דברים כב, ח) ולא תשים דמים בביתך:

משנה תורה, הלכות רוצח ושמירת נפש י"א:ד'

(ד) אֶחָד הֵגֵג וְאֶחָד כָּל דָּבָר שֵׁשׁ בּוֹ סִכָּנָה וְרֵאוּי שִׁכְשֵׁל בָּהּ אָדָם וְיָמוּת. כְּגוֹן שֶׁהֵיטָה לּוֹ בְּאֵר אוֹ בּוֹר בְּחִצְרוֹ בֵּין שֵׁשׁ בּוֹ מַיִם בֵּין שָׁאִין בּוֹ מַיִם חֵיב לַעֲשׂוֹת חֲלִיָּא גְבוּהָהּ עֲשָׂרָה טְפָחִים. אוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהּ כֶּסוּי כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִפֹּל בָּהּ אָדָם וְיָמוּת. וְכֵן כָּל מְכַשֵּׁל שֵׁשׁ בּוֹ סִכָּנָת נִפְשׁוֹת מְצוֹת עֲשֵׂה לְהַסִּירוֹ וְלְהַשְׁמֵר מִמֶּנּוּ וְלְהַזְהֵר בְּדָבָר יָפָה יָפָה. שְׁנֵאמַר (דברים ד ט) "הַשְׁמֵר לָהּ וְשָׁמֵר נִפְשָׁהּ". וְאִם לֹא הִסִּיר וְהִנִּיחַ הַמְּכַשׁוֹלוֹת הַמְּבִיאִין לְיָדֵי סִכָּנָה בְּטֵל מְצוֹת עֲשֵׂה וְעֵבֵר בְּ(דברים כב ח) "לֹא תָשִׂים דָּמִים":

The Talmud does not forbid weapons, but it does forbid selling weapons and their accessories to certain people. How might this relate to gun violence prevention today? What might be considered modern "auxiliary equipment?"

Avodah Zarah 15b

And furthermore, it is taught in a *baraita*: **One may not sell weapons to gentiles or the auxiliary equipment of weapons, and one may not sharpen weapons for them. And one may not sell them stocks** used for fastening the feet of prisoners, **or iron neck chains [*kolarin*], or foot chains, or iron chains.** This prohibition applies equally to **both a gentile and a Samaritan.**

Avodah Zarah 15b

Abaye analyzes this *baraita*: **What is the reason** for the prohibition against selling these items to Samaritans? **If we say that they are suspected of bloodshed**, that is difficult: **But are they suspected** of this? **Didn't you say that one may seclude oneself with them**, which indicates that they are not suspected of bloodshed? **Rather**, it is prohibited to sell these items to Samaritans **because they will come to sell them to a gentile.** According to this reasoning, it should likewise be prohibited to sell a donkey to a Jew who is suspected of selling animals to gentiles.

עבודה זרה ט"ו ב

ועוד תניא אין מוכרין להם לא זיין ולא כלי זיין ואין משחזין להן את הזיין ואין מוכרין להן לא סדן ולא קולרין ולא כבלים ולא שלשלאות של ברזל אחד עובד כוכבים ואחד כותי

עבודה זרה ט"ו ב

מ"ט אי נימא דחשידי אשפיכות דמים ומי חשידי האמרת ומייחדין עמהן אלא משום דאתי לזבונה לעובד כוכבים

According to this text, what is the general attitude of the majority of rabbis toward weapons? Why?

Shabbat 63a

MISHNA: Just as it is prohibited for a woman to carry out certain items unique to a woman into the public domain, the Sages said that **a man may neither go out on Shabbat with a sword, nor with a bow, nor with a shield [teris], nor with an alla, nor with a spear. And if he unwittingly went out with one of these weapons to the public domain he is liable to bring a sin-offering. Rabbi Eliezer says: These weapons are ornaments for him;** just as a man is permitted to go out into the public domain with other ornaments, he is permitted to go out with weapons. **And the Rabbis say: They are nothing other than reprehensible and in the future they will be eliminated, as it is written: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not raise sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4).**

שבת ס"ג א

מִתְּנִי' לֹא יֵצֵא הָאִישׁ לֹא בְּסִיף וְלֹא
בְּקֶשֶׁת וְלֹא בְּתַרְסִים וְלֹא בְּאַלָּה וְלֹא
בְּרוֹמַח. וְאִם יֵצֵא — תְּיִיב חֲטָאת. רַבִּי
אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר: תְּכַשִּׁיטִין הֵן לוֹ. וְחֻכְמִים
אוֹמְרִים: אֵינָן אֱלָא לְגִנְאֵי, שְׁנֵאמַר:
”וְכִתְּנוּ חֲרֻבוֹתֵם לְאַתִּים וְחֲנִיתוֹתֵיהֶם
לְמִזְמְרוֹת וְלֹא יִשָּׂא גֹי אֶל גֹּי חֶרֶב וְלֹא
יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.”

