

JEWS AND GUN CONTROL

By Judith Rice



Stop (enough) Violence - Petah Tikvah, Israel

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

Isaiah 2:4

“Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, “Otherwise the Hebrews will made swords or spears!”

Samuel 1: 13:14

“Those who beat their swords into plowshares usually end up plowing for those who didn’t.”

Benjamin Franklin

“Chandler, it’s not about gun control. It’s about control. Who do you trust to control you?”

William Rabinowitz to his grandson

“Where are the Rabbis on gun control? What do you mean they don’t agree?”

Evelyn Banner

The horror, the pain of liberals and conservatives after the murder of school children, *babies*, at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut, tore at the hearts of both sides, equally. A deranged young man, using semi-automatic weapons stolen from his mother after he had murdered her, slaughtered the defenseless innocents without emotion. The emotional repercussions have reverberated through the Jewish world.

Jews, mostly liberal, though not universally, have been in the forefront demanding gun control for many years. The vast majority of American Jews are liberals. Ironically, Jews faced a second Holocaust in 1948 as the victims of American gun control. President Truman was the first to recognize the Jewish State and then slammed an arms embargo against Israel and the Arab belligerents. The American Federal Bureau of Investigation worked to stop arms being supplied to the belligerents. It only affected the Jews. The Arabs had no problem obtaining weapons. They were being heavily armed by the Soviets. The Soviets agreed with the Americans, embargo the Jews. The guns obtained by the Israelis, from other sources and smuggled in illegally meant life itself to the Jews.

“Banning guns addresses a fundamental right of all Americans to feel safe.”

Diane Feinstein, U.S. Senator (D) California

“Why are guns the only unregulated consumer products in America? We regulate toy guns and teddy bears, but we do not regulate a product that kills 4,600 children a year.”

Marian Wright Edelman

Liberals energetically and quite logically argue, if guns are illegal, even better confiscated, there will be no more gun violence. It is not a hard concept to understand – *enough of the violence*. It is easy to appreciate and even value. When guns are illegal, there will not be another Sandy Hook mass murderer spraying bullets into tiny children’s bodies. Criminals, dangerous people, the mentally ill, Liberals reason, will not be able to walk into a school, a shopping mall, a movie theater, with an assault weapon to easily kill 50 people. Conservatives and Liberals agree that criminals and the mentally ill should not have a legal path to gun ownership.

Will gun violence be eliminated...?

Gun control may reduce gun violence, it does not reduce violence.

Cain murdered his brother Abel in a jealous rage over his perception of God’s favor. Cain did not murder his brother with an AR-15 assault style rifle, a Saturday night special concealed pocket revolver, or a full sized Austrian Glock 9mm handgun. Cain killed Abel by crushing his skull with a stone.

“Germans who wish to use firearms should join the SS or the SA- ordinary citizens don’t need guns, as their having guns doesn’t serve the State.”

Heinrich Himmler

Mass murder has been developed and refined by modern society to an industrial level. German technology, administered by the Nazis with active, at times energetic support of local sympathetic *occupied* populations, demonstrated how defenseless Jews, Gypsies and others they deemed as unworthy of life, could be efficiently, effectively, and *humanely*, as they termed it, be exterminated. From the outbreak of WWII, Germans used guns in mass executions to get rid of the Jews. It quickly became obvious to the Nazi commanders that guns alone were too inefficient. Shootings created terrible emotional issues for the murder squads. The Germans needed something better, more efficient than guns to kill Jews. Extermination factories were developed. The biggest factory was Auschwitz.

“One man with a gun can control 100 without one.”

Lenin (1870-1924)

The Germans always needed their guns. The Germans used guns on their unarmed victims to control them so the industrial murder machinery could operate efficiently. Jews, the German’s accurately recognized, wanted to live.

*“A sword never kills anybody;
It is a tool in the killer’s hand.”*

Lucius Anneus Seneca (54-BC -39 AD)

Roman armies slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Jews during the Judean revolts of the Hasmonaens. The streets of Jerusalem flowed ankle deep in Jewish blood. The Romans did not use guns. They used swords. It was very efficient for their time.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Turks massacred 1,500,000 unarmed Armenians using guns, knives and inhuman treatment. Defenseless Cambodians, Chinese, Russians, Rwandans, died by the tens of millions in the 20th century. Guns were the effective tool of murder and control. The extermination techniques worked very well but were not as efficient as the German industrialized processes.

“Among the many misdeeds of the British rule in India, history will look upon the act of depriving a whole nation of arms, as the blackest.”

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

The murder of the defenseless children at the Sandy Hook elementary school probably would not have been as great if guns were not involved. The murderer would have had to kill the children by some other less efficient means, perhaps a butcher’s knife or a sword. Not having a gun would not have

meant that the murderer would not have killed. It would have meant his efficiency at killing the defenseless might have been reduced.

“To disarm the people is the most effectual way to enslave them.”

George Mason (1752-1792)

The Nazis never proposed gun confiscation or gun control except for those people, especially Jews, they felt should not have guns. Gun confiscation was a liberal ideal of the German Weimar Republic after WWI.

American Blacks are the greatest victims of gun violence. Gun control advocates want to disarm Blacks and others. The Ku Klux Klan was and remains strong advocates for Black gun control.

The struggle over gun control is not a struggle between good evil but a struggle between competing ideas of how society should be ordered.

*“Good people do not need laws to tell them to act
Responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws.”*

Plato (428 B.C. to 348)

*“Dangerous laws created by well-intentioned people today can be used by dangerous people with an evil
intention tomorrow.”*

Alan Eppers

*“As I have stood in the crosshairs of those who target Second Amendment freedoms, I’ve realized that
firearms are not the only issue. No, it’s much, much bigger than that. I’ve come to understand that a
cultural war is raging across our land, in which, with Orwellian fervor, certain acceptable thoughts and
speech are mandated.”*

Charlton Heston

Pro-gun control is heavily championed by liberal and conservative Rabbinic leadership. On the opposite side are small Jewish groups, such as *the Jews for Responsible Gun Ownership*, led by an Orthodox Rabbi, Dovid Bendory.

*“Thou shall not be a perpetrator,
thou shall not be a victim,
and thou shall never, but never, be a bystander.”*

Yehuda Bauer

Jewish discussions, especially Jewish Rabbinic discussions, are rarely one sided. There are majority opinions and minority opinions. Orthodox Rabbinic leadership, the Rabbinic Jewish group considered as the most rigid and arbitrary by the liberal and conservative branches, is curiously the most balanced and pragmatic in their approach to gun control.

The principle guiding arguments for gun control in Reform, Conservative and other liberal Rabbinic views are sectarian. Orthodox Jews are guided by Jewish religious law and Torah.

What is Jewish religious law on gun control? What is Torah about gun control? The answers are...arguable.

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Weapons are not things that reasonable people should want.

*“One must not go out (on Shabbat) with a sword, bow, shield, lance, or with a spear; if he does he is liable for a sin offering. R. Eliezer said: they are ornaments for him (and this permitted to be worn on Shabbat), but the sages said they are merely shameful, for it is written (Isaiah 2:4) “They beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”*

*Talmud, Shabbat 63a*

Keeping or maintaining things that are known or intended to injure others, such as a gun, is not desirable:

*“R. Nathan says: from where is it derived that one should not breed a bad dog in his house, or keep an impaired ladder in his house? From the text (Deuteronomy 24:8), “You shall bring not blood upon your house.”*

*Talmud, Bava Kama 46a*

The “Maharshal” – Rabbi Shlomo Luria went even further. He argued that it is forbidden to keep or even raise a dangerous dog, even if the owner keeps it chained. A gun certainly falls within that definition. Even if a gun is kept safeguarded, it is still a potential danger to others or children. But on the other hand, in the tractate (fol. 83), Rabbi Luria continues, if a person lives in a dangerous area, keeping a vicious dog, trained to patrol and protect, is desirable. If a person lives in an area that is potentially dangerous, keeping a gun for home and self-protection is acceptable.

Jews are not encouraged to have weapons to hurt others but are permitted to have weapons to defend themselves.

Jews just observed two holidays, Purim and Passover.

During Purim Jews celebrate the reality of self-defense. We did not go and seek the blood of others. But when the evil decree of Haman came to kill the Jews, the King gave the Jews the right to take up arms and defend themselves. They did.

Jews also celebrated Pesach, the holiday of Jewish liberation. It is a unique holiday. God liberated the Jews from the evils of Egyptian slavery with a strong hand and with redeeming love. God had the former slaves wander in the desert for 40 years before coming to the Promised Land. The Jewish people were forced to learn the terrible arts of war. They learned to defend themselves. They had to learn how

to live in the land that God had given to them. They had to learn how to live when surrounded by neighbors who did not wish to live with them in peace.

*“If a thief is caught in the act of breaking into a house and is struck and killed in the process, the person who killed the thief is not guilty of murder.”*

*Exodus 22:2*

Is a person allowed to kill a burglar who breaks into their home in the dark of the night?

The Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 72a – Gemara:

*“Raba said: what is the reason for the law of breaking in? Because it is certain that no man is inactive where his property is concerned; therefore this one (the thief) must have reasoned, ‘If I go there, he (the owner) will oppose me and prevent me; but if he does I will kill him.’ Hence the Torah decreed, ‘if he comes to slay thee, forestall by slaying him.’”*

Rashi, the great Rabbinic commentator explained the concept simply. If a burglar breaks into your home, you are at risk if you try and defend your home and property. The burglar may have no compunction to kill you to steal what is yours, especially if you choose to defend or protect what you have. A robber understands that you might want to protect what is yours. The robber understands it might be necessary to kill you to steal what is yours. Facing a robber, who has a knife or a gun, with a cell phone in your hand as you frantically call the police to come and defend you, is not the same as defending your life, or the lives of your family, with a .357 Smith and Wesson magnum with hollow point bullets. The U.S. Supreme court has ruled that the police are not legally obligated to risk their lives to defend your life. The police generally are able to respond to crimes after the fact not before.

*“Do not stand idly by when your neighbor’s life is threatened, I am the LORD.”*

*Leviticus 19:16*

There is extensive Talmudic discussion about responsibility to our neighbors in the event their lives are in danger. If a person can save another’s life without sacrificing, recklessly or unnecessarily endangering their own life, they have an obligation to do so. If it involves using force, even a gun, it has to be considered.

The Jewish sages warned, *“A broken wall calls out to the thief (to come in)”*. If a thief knows in advance that a victim is unarmed, it is an invitation to the thief to rob, assault or even murder. Criminals, the Rabbis recognized, are criminals because they do not follow the law. Criminals arm themselves even if the law says that guns are illegal.

Should guns be sold to anyone without question?

*“Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God, I am the LORD.”*

*Leviticus 19:14*

The extension of the argument is, can weapons be sold to people who are criminals, mentally ill or possibly intending to use them to injure others? Can weapons be sold to people who may potentially turn them on you or your neighbor? Generally, the answer is no. A gun is a gun. Its intended use can be for defense or to harm others. The seller of the gun is obligated to know with whom they are dealing and the probable intended use of the gun. Are background checks desirable? The general answer is yes.

But there is still a caveat:

*“A system of licensing and registration is the perfect device to deny gun ownership to the bourgeoisie.”*

*Lenin (1870-1924)*

The arguable part is, is a gun for offensive or defensive purposes?

Rabbi J. David Bleich cites Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah, Laws of a Murderer 12:12*.

*“It is forbidden to sell heathens weapons of war. Nor is it permitted to sharpen their spears, or to sell them knives, manacles, iron chains, bears, lions, or any object which can endanger the public; but it is permitted to sell them shields which are for defense.”*

Exactly who decides who gets a weapon and what is considered a defensive weapon? It is not clearly defined.

*“When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.”*

*Deuteronomy 22:8*

If a Jew has a weapon, but he is not carrying it or using it for self-defense, what is that person's responsibility? The responsibility is clear – they are reasonably responsible for how and where the weapons are kept and who might have access to them – such as children.

Jews are not obligated to turn the other cheek when they are threatened. Jews have a long history of self-defense when they are permitted to do so.

*“Good intentions will always be pleaded for every assumption of authority. It is hardly too strong to say that the Constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intentions. There are men in all ages who mean to govern well, but they mean to govern. They promise to be good masters, but they mean to be masters.”*

*Daniel Webster*

The majority of American Jews do not understand the historic American distrust of a powerful, centralized, controlling government. Perhaps it is because of Jewish deep seated fears and distrust of local authority ingrained from centuries of European anti-Semitic experience. As minorities, Jews could

do little against local bigotry, but as wards or “property” of the King, the central national authority would protect them as long as they were useful to the Crown.

The American Jewish experience has been and is largely the opposite of the European experience. America is very different from Europe. The American Constitution guaranteed certain rights and freedoms, those not enumerated, were reserved to the States.

*“Foolish liberals who are trying to read the Second Amendment out of the Constitution by claiming it’s not an individual right or that it’s too much of a public safety hazard, don’t see the danger in the big picture. They’re courting disaster by encouraging others to use the same means to eliminate portions of the Constitution they don’t like.”*

*Alan Dershowitz*

Liberal Jews discount the meaning of the second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution’s protection for every American to keep guns as nothing more than a vestige of a cowboy era long gone. The majority of American Jews are not sensitive to the divisive and disturbing fears of many Americans when President Obama defined his Presidential objective to *fundamentally transform America*. America is being transformed. For many Americans their understood freedoms from the power of the central government to control their lives, their thoughts and their culture is intrusively and disruptively occurring. Americans on both sides of the political spectrum are more uncomfortable with the future of America than ever before. Guns are but a symptom of that transformation. The right to defend your home and your family from outside assault is being assaulted.

Yet American Jews defend loudly Israel’s right to have guns, just not their own or their neighbor’s right to do the same. In Israel, guns on the street, carried openly, are a common site. There is no universal right to gun ownership in Israel. Guns are highly restricted and controlled by the central government. Assault rifles and military weaponry are absolutely prohibited from general public ownership. Only those deemed as needing to own a gun, usually a hand gun, are permitted to legally own guns. Many guns are owned illegally. Without saying so, Israelis are more comfortable with gun ownership and gun control in Jewish hands than in Arab.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu succinctly summarized the gun conflict from Israel’s perspective.

*“If Palestinians were to lay down their guns tomorrow, there would be no war. If Israel were to lay down theirs, there would be no Israel.”*

What does God want?

***“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good***

***And what does the Lord require of you?***

***To act justly and to love mercy***

***And to walk humbly with your God.”***

***Micah 6:8***

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