

The talmudic injunction quoted by Rabbi Koppell affirms both a right and a duty to defend one's own life, for life is a divine gift. There is also a duty to defend innocents: "nor shall you stand idly by when your neighbor's life is at stake." (Leviticus 19:16)

Oppressors have always tried to suppress Jewish arms. In pre-monarchic times, "there was no smith found throughout the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears..." (1 Samuel 13:19) Later, the dhimmi, the Jews and Christians of Muslim-ruled lands, were forbidden to possess arms or to defend themselves from attacks by Muslims. The Nazis used gun registration lists to confiscate Jewish arms.

Conversely, armed Jewish resistance to the Nazis saved many lives and strengthened Jewish claims to be treated as active allies of the West rather than as passive supplicants.

Regarding military guns, automatic firearms have been very strictly regulated ever since the National Firearms Act of 1934. Contemporary gun prohibitionists attempt to confuse the public by proposing bans on guns that look like machine guns, but which actually function like ordinary guns.

"If someone comes to kill you, get up early in the morning to kill him first." What is the origin and meaning of this quote? This philosophy of self-defense clearly originates from the centuries of persecution the Jewish people have experienced. However, there are many different interpretations as to the meaning of this passage. Numerous scholars, philosophers, and social activists — including Henry David Thoreau,

Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. — have understood the concept of killing "him first" to mean that instead of killing your oppressor you peacefully disarm and change him forever. Human rights must be asserted forcefully but without physical violence.

Accordingly, I agree with Rabbi Bonnie

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Sanhedrin 72a

Judaism is not a pacifist tradition. We recognize not only a right but, it can be argued, an obligation of self-defense. We acknowledge the "yetzer ha-ra," the inclination toward evil, the temptation toward wrongdoing with which we struggle individually and communally. Given the reality of the world in which we live, having firearms reasonably available to those who pass fair background checks seems prudent. The Bill of Rights enshrines this right and we do well to consider the wisdom of the founders of our nation in asserting this right so powerfully. And while hunting is not part of Jewish culture, it is still a legal sport in which many of our fellow Americans choose to engage.

There is no reason, though, to allow the sale of weapons that have exclusively military or criminal applications. The Talmud clearly prohibits the sale of weapons to those bent on destruction. (*Avoda Zara 15b*) As with any privilege, responsible application is critical. We hope, pray, and work for a messianic age in which peaceful coexistence prevails. We are enjoined to "seek peace and pursue it." (Psalms 34:14) It behooves us to develop the skills we need to peacefully coexist within our families, our communities, and our world. Until we reach that longed-for era, possession of modest firearms seems reasonable.

— Bonnie Koppell

great harm or even death if not handled properly. State law required hours of instruction as well as written and road tests to get a license — and a year's probation. But I can buy a rifle with no permit, instruction, or examination, and no safety certification — just a background check that says I haven't shot anyone (yet).

In tractate *Bava Kamma* 80b Rav preaches that it is forbidden to own a dangerous animal. Rav's view is that we should not possess items that pose a physical threat to others. The threats of injury from firearms are risks that fall under Rav's edict.

— David Levy

Koppell that "... responsible application is critical... [and that until] we reach that longed-for era, possession of modest firearms seems reasonable." Thus, we must strike a balance between the Jewish values that cherish all forms of life and our need for defense in a world where antisemitism and other forms of hatred prevail. We must continue the never-ending struggle for justice and equality.

— Nathan Weissler

While I tend to agree that the Sanhedrin text is a call to self defense both politically and personally, I am wary to view this text as a Jewish call to arms. The dangers of personal gun ownership outweigh the value of holding firearms — even for self-defense.

When I was learning to drive in New York, it was impressed upon me that a car could cause

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