



Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, *Director*  
Susan Friedberg Kalson,  
*Chair, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism*

Arthur and Sara Jo Kobacker Building  
2027 Massachusetts Avenue NW, at Kivie Kaplan Way,  
Washington, DC 20036  
202.387.2800 @theRAC RAC.org

**Judaism and Gun Violence In America**  
**Gun Violence Prevention (GVP) Shabbat 2022 Text Study**

**Gun Violence Prevention (GVP) Shabbat**

December 14, 2022, will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sandy Hook tragedy. The URJ is a partner for the National Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence, organized by Newtown Action Alliance. In partnership and solidarity, the URJ is observing Gun Violence Prevention Shabbat on December 9-10, 2022. For congregations and communities who wish to take part in this observance, the RAC has prepared the following Gun Violence Prevention Text Study.

Each year millions of Americans and their communities are tragically impacted by gun violence. Countless lives are lost, their names forgotten except to their loved ones. Beyond the eyes of the public and the press, gun violence takes lives from communities across the United States, especially Communities of Color that have faced racist, discriminatory policies and lack of economic and educational opportunities and engagement.

On this Shabbat, we take a moment to remember all people who have been impacted by gun violence: those who died or were injured, those who have lost loved ones, those whose pain is mourned quietly in anonymity or in public view.

On Shabbat, we take time to rest and reflect, but for those whose lives have been forever marred by gun violence – whether because their lives or the lives of their loved ones were forever changed – we remember that this respite is temporary. The grief that someone feels because of a loved one taken by a gun does not rest on Shabbat. The work that advocates and grassroots activists do does not rest on Shabbat. The toll that gun violence has on our society does not rest, and it is important during this holy time to not only rest and reflect on the week but to keep in mind those who cannot, those who will never again light Shabbat candles, and anyone who has been or ever will be impacted by gun violence.

This GVP Shabbat, we invite congregations and communities to explore our responsibility as Jews to ourselves, to one another, to our communities, and to our nation. We bear responsibility to repair the brokenness of the world and hope this text inspires guidance to heal communities and advance a more whole, just, and compassionate world.

**Gun Violence in America**

In America, we see the impact of gun violence at a higher rate than in any other country with similar socioeconomic status. It has always been and will continue to always be unacceptable. We see time and time again: shootings happen, survivors call for action, but then the cameras leave, and the rest of the country is somehow able to forget. But each day, the survivors, their families, and the families of the victims have to continue to fight and live with the grief. It is not enough that we pay attention for a



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moment after crisis when this is an ongoing, unresolved crisis. Other countries like Canada and Australia have eradicated this epidemic of gun violence – and so can the United States. This is not an issue of politics, mental health, or religion: it is a matter of protecting people in the United States, and working to ensure the next generation does not experience the toll that gun violence has taken on so many people in the United States.

*For more information about the RAC's work on gun violence prevention, please visit [www.rac.org/gvp](http://www.rac.org/gvp).*



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## Gun Safety

*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. - [Deuteronomy 22:8](#)*

From where is it derived that one may not raise a vicious dog in his house, and that one may not set up an unstable ladder in his house? As it is stated: “You shall not bring blood into your house” (Deuteronomy 22:8), which means that one may not allow a hazardous situation to remain in his house. Similarly, a person should not keep a forewarned ox in his possession, as it is dangerous. This is why Rabbi Eliezer rules that no level of safeguarding is sufficient for it; the ox should be slaughtered so that it will not cause damage. - Bava Kama 46a commenting on Deut. 22:8

- What is our responsibility to keep others safe with our property?
- Based on these texts, what firearm laws do you think the Torah would have included that mirrors Torah laws on how our homes are designed and animals are watched?

## Gun Violence Prevention Activism

*You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. – [Pirkei Avot 2:21](#)*

For many of us, the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs praying. - [Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel](#)

- Do any of these texts speak to you? If so, which ones? How can we take on being part of the change without feeling the entire burden fall on our shoulders?
- Some people find it very easy to talk about the effects of gun violence. For many, its terrible consequences on people, especially Communities of Color, are undeniable. Yet legislation that would protect people – such as the assault weapons ban and comprehensive background checks – are considered politically impossible to pass. How can we apply our Jewish texts to this impasse?
- How can we balance the successes we accomplish together and the knowledge that more work still needs to be done?

## Gun Access

We don't sell to them [idolaters] a weapon or the housings [or accessories] of a weapon, nor do we sharpen a blade for them. Not stocks, neck chains, fetters, chains of bronze--neither to an idolater nor to a Cuthean (Samaritans who were responsible for postponing the building of the 2nd temple). - [Avodah Zarah 15b](#)

- Why were idolaters banned from purchasing weapons?
- We have restrictions on who should be able to purchase firearms, including convicted felons and domestic abusers. How do our categories of banned purchasers match and differ from this law?
- Who do you think should be able to purchase firearms, and who should be banned?

## Gun Violence Prevention

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 a sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore*” (Isaiah 2:4). - [Shabbat 63a](#)

Tosefet Lachazon Hashalom - An Appendix to the Vision of Peace by Yehuda Amichai

Don't stop after beating the swords  
into plowshares, don't stop!  
Go on beating  
and make musical instruments out of them.  
Whoever wants to make war again  
will have to turn them into plowshares first.

- Why do we have laws about carrying weapons specifically on Shabbat?
- What does Shabbat represent, and why do you think we are set up to have a break from dangerous items?
- We have a right to protect ourselves. What is the solution when one person's way of protecting themselves (firearms) can also make other people feel less safe?

*This resource is adapted from a [Shavuot text study](#) developed by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Rabbi Andrew Terkel.*