GUN REGULATION

Jewish tradition emphasizes the sanctity and primary value of human life. Consider how these texts guide our thoughts as the United States faces record gun violence and ongoing gun regulation discussion.

ושפט בין הגוים והוכיח לעמים רבים וכתתו חרבותם לאתים וחניתתיהם למזמרות לא ישא גוי אל לגוי חרב
ולא ילמדן עוד מלחמה

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not take up Sword against nation; They shall never again know war. (Isaiah 2:4)

כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך כי יפול הנופל ממנו

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)

He who takes one life it is as though he has destroyed the universe and he who saves one life it is as though he has saved the universe" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5)

'He placed at the East of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim and the flaming sword' say: 'At the East of the Garden of Eden at the very spot where stood the Cherubim with the flaming sword - there was Gehenna created.' (Bereshit Rabbah 21:13)

The Talmud prohibits selling a weapon to a mashmuta-a Jewish bandit who has no history of violence but may use the weapon to escape capture. Rashi (Avodah Zarah 15b, s.v.L'Olam) notes that even if one is certain that the bandit won't use the weapon to kill someone, he may use it to threaten someone and commit a crime (steal, et cetera). Thus, selling weapons to a bandit could make one guilty as an accessory to a crime. Rabbeinu Nissim (Avodah Zarah 5a), however, has a different explanation. He suggests that even if the bandit does not have a violent past, he will eventually be in a situation where he will use the weapon to avoid being captured. According to Rabbeinu Nissim, we are not only prohibited from selling weapons to people who are actually prone to commit murder, we may not sell weapons to those who have a greater than average propensity to use the weapon in a destructive manner.

Most authorities say it is not permissible to hunt for sport. Two sources are generally cited in this regard. Rabbi Isaac Lampronri wrote that it is forbidden to hunt animals because it's wasteful. The 18th century rabbinic authority Ezekiel Landau added that recreational hunting is forbidden on the grounds of animal cruelty and because of the risks to the hunter.

Esau and Nimrod, the only two biblical figures known to be hunters, are not considered our role models. On the other hand, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and King David were herders, nurturers of animals. Hunting for food is, in principle, not objectionable. However, land animals must be ritually slaughtered by hand to render them kosher, which would make hunting them for food with a firearm impermissible.

CONSIDER:
- If you only read Isaiah, what would you think about Judaism's perspective on gun ownership?
- Can causing the loss of a life and saving a life ever be in conflict?
- How does this inform how we use and store firearms?
- What do these texts say about the sale of weapons?
- According to the text provided, who should be barred from purchasing a weapon? Are there responsibilities of one who sells weapons?

- Why is causing the loss of life of an individual as if one has destroyed the entire world?
- Discuss the sport of hunting and if you think it is consistent with Jewish teachings, texts and values.
- Discuss the Jewish history of oppression and antisemitism as related to the gun control debate.
- Is gun ownership a direct violation of these affirmations of our tradition?
- How do our laws guide the law of the land, which is not guided by Jewish law?

NEXT STEPS:
- Take the time to call/write/text your government official to explain your viewpoint.
- Attend rallies to support your viewpoint.
- Participate in lectures where you can learn more about the other side.
- Donate money to an organization that supports your point of view.
- Interact with those who you disagree with respect, sensitivity, kindness and dignity.