

## STRAIGHT SHOOTER

I will never forget leading my troops up to the crest of the ridge. Quietly, stealthily, we crept up the sand dune until we could just peek over the top. I waved to the others to follow me, staking out their position, so that we were shielded.



Pointing out the imaginary Russian Special Ops forces landing on this Cape Cod beach, I instructed my troops to ready their weapons. When the enemy got close, we fired, and the battle commenced.

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You may be wondering what on earth I am describing. As most of you know, I've never served in the military.

This Shabbat we honored those who served our country in our armed forces. It was so powerful to hear how they served. Their bravery and dedication know no bounds; we all thank them for their service.

Somehow as a child, I internalized what I thought was the excitement of serving in the military. Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, I felt that Russia was our enemy and that war with them could be imminent.

The Cold War was real.

And somehow I loved guns, although my parents forbade the purchase of even toy guns, including squirt guns. My cousins and I would use sticks and even a table leg as pretend guns and rifles. It was quite a sight to see us holding up table legs and sticks, trying to aim.

Playing army was a past time that could occupy us for hours on end; attending to missions with zeal and intensity that we thought could be matched only by the real experience.



\* \* \*

But toy guns are not real guns.

Did you know that [the Bureau of Consumer Protections](#) regulates toy guns, but, unbelievably, it does not regulate real guns?



Consequently, we do not have smart gun technology and other protections in place [[See this newsclip about the ATF and how politics are preventing this bureau from doing its job!](#)].

And this week, I stand before you once again in sadness due to another [mass shooting by a violent, abusive man](#) who was able to buy several



guns because [his name was not entered into the Federal list of those who are prohibited from buying guns](#). This man, who had [smashed his infant step-son's skull](#), [was still able to purchase weapons](#) including [the military style assault rifle he used in this attack](#).

Enough is enough.

The current week's mass shooting -- it seems that we have one every week -- hit particularly close to home. That an ex-military criminal could walk into a church that his ex-wife's mother attended to act out some kind of deranged revenge fantasy is frightening to us all.



Photo credit: Nick Wagner/Austin American-Statesman via AP via Tampa Bay Times

Learning that there is no place that is free of violence fills us with fear and sadness and hearing that the pastor's 14-year-old daughter was murdered hit particularly close to home.

1. Annabelle "Belle" Pomeroy, 14, daughter of the regular pastor
2. Haley Krueger, 16
3. Lula White, 71

4. Keith Braden, 62
5. Peggy Warden, 56
6. Dennis Johnson, Sr., 77
7. Sara Johnson, 68
8. Ricardo Rodriguez, 64
9. Therese Rodriguez, 66
10. Robert Marshall, 56
11. Karen Marshall, 56
12. Robert Corrigan, 51
13. Shani Corrigan, 51
14. Joann Ward, 30
15. Emily Garcia, 7, daughter of Joann Ward
16. Brooke Ward, 5, daughter of Joann Ward
17. Tara E. McNulty, 33, close friend of the Holcombe family
18. Bryan Holcombe, 60, serving as the guest pastor
19. Karla Holcombe, 58
20. Marc "Danny" Holcombe, 36, son of John and Karla
21. Noah Holcombe, 18-months old, daughter of Danny Holcombe
22. Crystal Holcombe, 36, daughter-in-law of John and Karla, pregnant at time of shooting
23. Gregory Hill, 13, son of Crystal Holcombe
24. Emily Hill, 11, daughter of Crystal Holcombe
25. Megan Hill, 9, daughter of Crystal Holcombe

The murder of all these people overwhelms us with grief.

Enough is enough.

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I stand before you this morning to speak out on an issue that has been close to my heart for decades.

As most of you know, I have been working to help strengthen common sense gun laws to protect all of us, most especially our children and grandchildren.

After the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson, Arizona seven years ago, I started an organization called [Clergy Against Bullets](#), to ban high-capacity cartridges that were available for purchase at Walmart -- no background check required.

While it has not been all failures, there have been times when I have felt like I was tilting at windmills.

The strength of the [National Rifle Association's extremist lobby](#) has been depressing and demoralizing; the sheer scope of this epidemic is overwhelming: [32,000 murdered each year by guns](#).

Gun manufacturers make billions of dollars; in 2012, this industry grossed \$31.8 billion dollars. Then, these gun manufacturers turn around and give hundred of millions to prevent any gun research or gun protections; they give this money to the NRA, lobbying firms, and to political campaigns and politicians.

This is a circle -- gun money to the NRA to the politicians to prevent anything to save lives. The only goal is to enable people to buy more guns. A circle, a circle of death and profit off of death. There is a reason there is almost one gun per person in this country -- the highest ratio by far in the Western world. [[See the relevant statistics in Nicholas Kristof's op-ed about the public health crisis.](#)]

The majority of the 32,000 people killed each year in the U.S. are suicides; those are still murders. This is an indictment of our inadequate efforts to treat mental illness and prevent its sufferers from obtaining weapons that make taking their lives far too easy.

Gun deaths occur in homes as accidents, in domestic abuse situations, in confrontations, in violence associated with drugs and gangs, and by people who can [far too easily purchase a bump stock which turns their legally obtained assault rifles into the equivalent of an automatic weapon so they can kill 58 people in Las Vegas from their hotel room in a matter of seconds](#).



Is this what we want in our country?

Is this an America we can be proud of?

Are we all not ashamed and appalled?

Enough is enough.

In order not to be too demoralized, I will highlight some of our successes:

1. In 2012, I was among a group of religious leaders who met with Senator Scott Brown who, as a Republican, cast the deciding vote to defeat conceal and carry reciprocity. This most dangerous bill that has been recently reintroduced to Congress would force states like our own to accept conceal and carry permits from states with particularly weak laws. If this happens, it will endanger our lives and it should be fought with vigor.

2. In our own Commonwealth of Massachusetts, we were able to pass new [gun legislation](#) that has strengthened our existing gun laws giving our state the lowest rate of gun deaths per capita in the U.S. today.

3. Thanks to numerous programs, such as [Sandy Hook Promise](#), people are more aware of the dangers of gun violence and how bullying influences these issues.

Sadly, after seven years of work, we have not been able to successfully pass one piece of federal legislation. We have not yet been able to do the following, which we need to do:

Have comprehensive and consistent federal gun legislation, urging our legislators to:

- [Restore public access to crime gun trace data](#)
- Require criminal background checks for all guns sold in the U.S.
- Promote the research into and use of [Smart Gun Technology](#)
- Limit how many guns one person can buy in one transaction and can own
- Renew the assault weapons ban
- Outlaw high-capacity magazines
- Support efforts to close the private sale loophole

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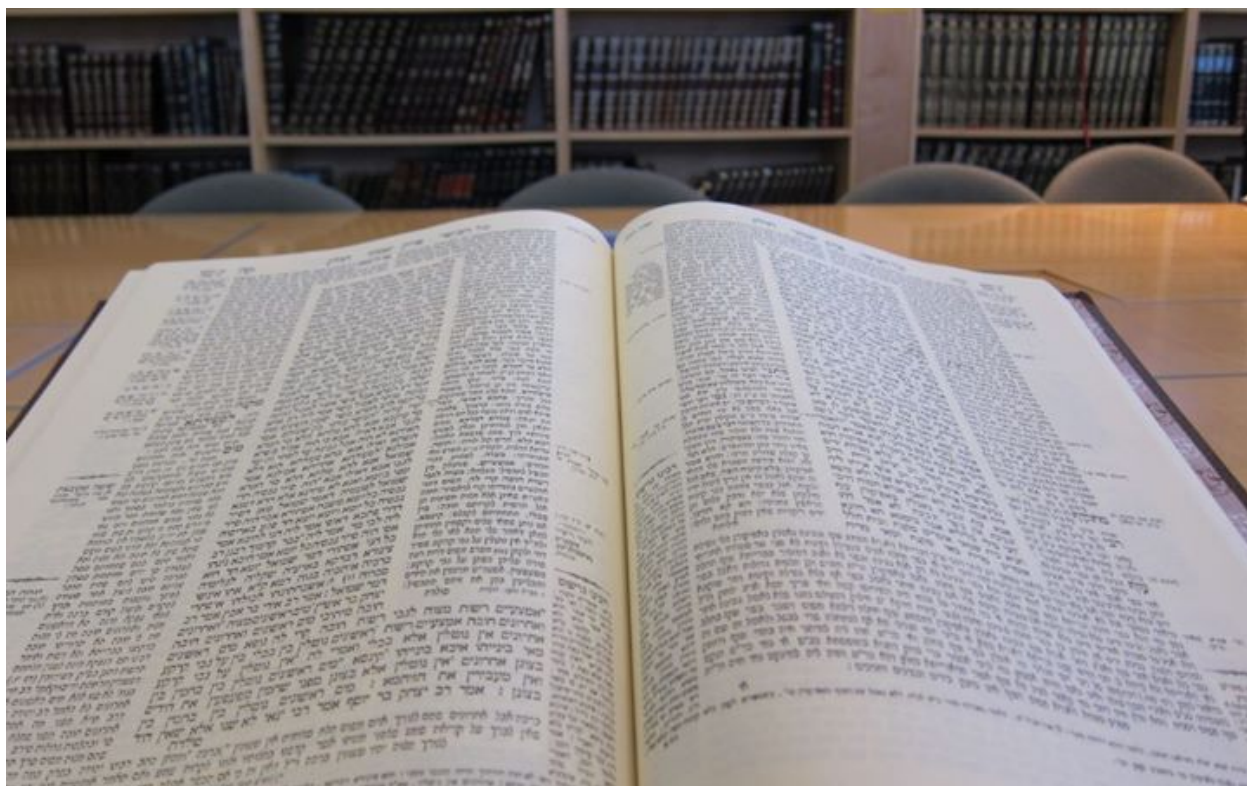
What does our tradition teach about gun violence?



While guns were not yet invented when many of our texts were written, Jewish sources do have relevance here.

Concerned about the danger of weapons falling into the wrong hands and to prevent arms trafficking, our ancient rabbis set stringent guidelines not only for the sale of weapons, but also for the sale of material that could be used to make weapons.

“What is the reason [that you cannot sell even material]? Because they can be flattened out and weapons made from them.” (B. Talmud Avodah Zarah 15b-16a)



And the Talmud also teaches: “Whoever is able to protest against the [sins of the] people of his household and does not protest is caught in the [sins] of his household; against [the sins of] the people of his city [and does not protest] is caught in the [sins] of the people of his city; against [the sins of] the whole world [and does not protest] is caught in the [sins] of the whole world.” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b)

This applies in many situations: if we can speak out when something is wrong, we must. If we do not take action to save a life, we are complicit.

We are guilty.

And finally, our Mishnah states famously: “If you save one life, it is as if you saved the world, (Sanhedrin 4:5) reminding us that every human is infinitely precious and saves not only that person, but also their future generations.

Have we done all we can to save even just one life from gun violence?

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This week’s Torah reading, *parashat Hayyei Sarah*, opens with Sarah’s death. In the ensuing verses, Abraham purchases a burial plot for his wife and buries her, the first burial in the Torah.

In our tradition, participating in the preparation for burial or the internment itself is called the *hesed shel emet* -- the truest act of loving kindness.

Thus we elevate this as a particularly praise-worthy *mitzvah* -- whether we are helping with the funeral or the *shivah* arrangements, [lovingly preparing the body through tahara \(spiritual purification of the body\)](#), or whether we are covering the coffin with earth at the cemetery.

Friends, there have been far too many funerals from gun violence.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been murdered in our country and while we could point to all of the contributing factors, including violence in our culture, people with anger issues, and the glorification of guns, the bottom line is that there are too many guns in the hands of people who should not have them.

Enough is enough.

\* \* \*

Even though Australia participates in the same Western culture as we do with its violent movies and violent video games, it [was able to significantly diminish the rate of gun deaths through common-sense legislation](#).





There is no reason that we cannot do the same ([see Jon Oliver here](#)).

This is not rocket science.

The Second Amendment wanted to make sure we could have guns for an armed militia before we had organized armed forces, National Guard, and armed police forces, not so deranged domestic abusers could obtain dozens of assault rifles.

Come on!

And even if you disagree with me and still believe we need guns, we can all agree that we can do better.

We can come up with protections like those they have in Israel to help those who are stable and responsible still have guns, while cutting down on the carnage.

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This summer, [I decided that as an activist for common-sense gun safety](#), I needed to learn more about these weapons.

So, I visited a nearby gun range with a responsible gun owner. I was truly impressed by how this person transported guns in separate locked bags with the gun locks on each gun and having the bullets in another locked container.

We brought in all these armaments and learned how to clean, load and handle these arms.

Then I learned how to shoot. I guess those years of playing soldier helped since I was actually a decent shot....

But I came away with three thoughts:

First, how a person who is extremely conscientious, could probably own and store and handle guns safely. I am not sure how many U.S. gun owners fit that high standard.

Second, it is depressing to see how much fear there must be in our society that so many people feel they need a gun. We actually live in a safe time with low crime rate and [the lowest homicide rate in decades](#).

Third, was the overwhelming feeling of deep, deep sadness. As I lifted a loaded weapon, I realized that I now possessed the power to take a life - my own, the person next to me in the range, anyone.... So easily.... I was frightened and needed to breathe to calm my own anxiety.

I come before you as a straight-shooter to say that:

Enough is enough.

We can do better and we must do better.

For starters, join the [Massachusetts Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence](#) and then join a national organization like [Everytown for Gun Safety](#).

We can do better.



PLEASE SHARE THIS INFORMATION WITH YOUR NETWORKS!!

We strongly suggest that you plan to arrive early, ideally by 10:00 AM, for the hearing of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security on Thursday, Nov. 16.

We expect members of the Massachusetts NRA Affiliate, GOAL, to show up in large numbers to push for their agenda, especially the legalization of silencers in MA.

Arriving early will increase the likelihood of getting a good seat for the hearing!

[Click here for hearing details](#). And remember to wear your orange t-shirts if you have them!

~ See you on Thursday ~

Other actions we can take:

- Support the “Where did the gun come from?” campaign of Citizens for Safety.
- Encourage parents to ask if the homes their children play in have guns – “Is there an unlocked gun in your home?”
- Oppose “Stand Your Ground” laws and “Concealed Carry” laws, especially conceal and carry reciprocity across state lines.
- Invite political leaders, mental health experts, and educators to our communities to share views and develop action plans to stop gun violence.
- Learn about the daily reality of urban gun violence from such organizations as Citizens for Safety and Stop Handgun Violence.
- Organize adult education programs to learn more about gun violence and what you can do.
- Organize programs for parents and children through religious schools, Jewish day schools, and youth groups to address issues of violence that touch all of us and the choices we can make in our own lives to help create a more nonviolent society.
- Dialogue with responsible gun owners so that, together, we can save lives.

Sources:

“We may not sell to them armament nor accessories of armament. Just as it is forbidden to sell weapons to an idol worshipper, so it is forbidden to sell them to a Jewish robber.... We may not sell thick pieces of iron to them. What is the reason? Because they can be flattened out and weapons made from them.” (Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 15b-16a)

We recommend the following resources for information and action suggestions concerning gun violence:

<https://ragvtest.weebly.com/> (Rabbis Against Gun Violence)

<http://faithsagainstgunviolence.org/> (Faiths United Against Gun Violence)



<https://everytown.org/> (Everytown for Gun Safety)  
<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/clergyagainstublets/> (Clergy Against Bullets)  
<http://donotstandidlyby.org/> (The Do Not Stand Idly By Campaign)  
<http://www.vpc.org/> (The Violence Policy Center)  
<http://www.stophandgunviolence.org/> (Stop Handgun Violence)  
<http://www.bradycampaign.org/> (The Brady Campaign)  
<https://www.thetrace.org/>  
<http://www.askingsaveskids.org/>  
<https://www.thetrace.org/2016/08/15-facts-that-show-how-guns-make-domestic-violence-even-deadlier/>

Massachusetts Board of Rabbis Public Policy Statement (2013):

<https://www.massrabbis.org/public-policy/policy-statements/guns>

#### Rabbinical Assembly Statements on Gun Violence

- RA 2014 -  
<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/resolution-sensible-gun-control-united-states>
- RA 2013 -  
<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/resolution-against-gun-violence-united-states-0?tp=491>
- RA 2011 -  
<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/resolution-high-capacity-ammunition-magazines?tp=212>
- RA 1995 -  
[https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/social\\_action/resolutions/reolution-violence-and-gun-control-1995.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/social_action/resolutions/reolution-violence-and-gun-control-1995.pdf)
- RA 1990 -  
[https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/social\\_action/resolutions/omnibus-resolution-reaffirmation-1990.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/social_action/resolutions/omnibus-resolution-reaffirmation-1990.pdf)