Security Guards in a Synagogue – Handout

# Judaism and Weapons

# Tanach

# Genesis 14:11-15

[The invaders] seized all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, the son of Abram’s brother, and his possessions, and departed; for he had settled in Sodom. A fugitive brought the news to Abram the Hebrew, who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram’s allies. When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

# Exodus 13:17-18

Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.” So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt.

# Nehemiah 4:10-12

From that day on, half my servants did work and half held lances and shields, bows and armor. And the officers stood behind the whole house of Judah who was rebuilding the wall. The basket-carriers were burdened, doing work with one hand while the other held a weapon. As for the builders, each had his sword girded at his side as he was building.

# Tannaitic

# Exodus 20:22

And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them.

# Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 20:22:2

YOU HAVE PROFANED IT — Thus you may learn that if you lift up your iron tool above it, you profane it. The reason of this is because the altar is created to lengthen man’s days and iron has been created to shorten man’s days, it is not right that an object which shortens man’s life should be lifted up above that which lengthens it.

And a further reason: because the altar makes peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven, and therefore there should not come upon it anything that cuts and destroys.

# Weapons in Shul

# Shulchan Aruch, Orach Hayyim 151:6

There are those who forbid entering a synagogue with a long knife or an uncovered head.

# Turei Zahav on Shulchan Aruch

Since prayer lengthens one’s days and a knife shortens. And we rule that here, it implies a knife that is not long, there is no concern that the knife will shorten one’s days.

# Numbers 25:7

When Pinchas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, saw this, he left the assembly and, taking a spear in his hand…

# Sanhedrin 82a

It is written with regard to Pinchas: “He arose from amidst the assembly and he took a spear in his hand” (Numbers 25:7). From here, where it is written that he took the spear only after he arose from the assembly, it is derived that one does not enter the study hall with a weapon. The assembly in this context is referring to the seat of the Sanhedrin. Pinchas removed the blade of the spear and placed it in his garment and held the shaft of the spear like a walking stick.

# The Nature of a Weapon

# Mishneh Torah, Shabbat 25:1-3

There is a vessel the use of which is for permissible work - and that is a vessel with which one may do something on Shabbat which can be done for him on weekdays. For example, a cup from which to drink, a bowl from which to eat, a knife with which to cut meat or bread, a hammer with which to break open nuts and that which is similar to them.

And there is a vessel the use of which is for forbidden work - and that is a vessel that it is forbidden on Shabbat to do the thing that is done with it. For example, a mortar or a mill or that which is similar to them - as it is forbidden to pound and to grind on Shabbat.

It is permissible to move any vessel the use of which is for permissible work - whether it was of wood or clay or stone or metal - and whether it is for the vessel's own sake, or for the need of its place or for the need of itself. But regarding any vessel the use of which is for forbidden work - whether it was of wood or clay or stones or metal - it is only permissible to move it for the need of itself or for the need of its place. But it is forbidden to move it for the vessel's own sake.

# Shulchan Shlomo, Orach Chaim, 108:16

And nevertheless, it's reasonable to say that it is permitted to carry a rifle or pistol on Shabbat in order to intimidate onlookers, for it's reasonable to say that at a time that is not wartime, most of a rifle's function is to intimidate/deter, and because of this intimidation, it's considered necessary...and thus I think that it should be akin to a "kli sh'melachto l'heter" since it is designated to intimidate. And even the bullets that are in it, since they are intimidating as well, they are considered to be part of the gun.

**Brandishing a Weapon**

# Shabbat 63a

## Mishnah

A man must not go out with a sword, bow, shield, lance or spear; and if he does go out, he incurs a sin-offering. R. Eliezer said: they are ornaments for him. But the sages maintain they are merely shameful, for it is said, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

## Gemara

R. ELIEZER SAID: THEY ARE ORNAMENTS FOR HIM. It was taught: Said they to R. Eliezer: Since they are ornaments for him, why should they cease in the days of the Messiah? Because they will not be required, he answered, as it is said, nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Yet let them exist merely as ornaments? — Said Abaye. It may be compared to a candle at noon

**What is a Synagogue Supposed to be?**

# Megillah 26a

RESIDENTS OF A TOWN WHO SOLD THE TOWN SQUARE may purchase a synagogue with the proceeds. Rabba bar bar Ḥana said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: This is the statement of Rabbi Menaḥem bar Yose. However, the Rabbis say: The town square does not have any sanctity.

IF THEY SOLD A SYNAGOGUE, THEY MAY PURCHASE AN ARK. Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: They taught this only with regard to a synagogue of a village. However, with regard to a synagogue of a city, since people come to it from the outside world, the residents of the city are not able to sell it, because it is considered to be the property of the public.

**Obligation to Protect Ourselves**

# Deuteronomy 22:8

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.

# Mishneh Torah, Murderer and the Preservation of Life 11:4

There is no difference between a roof or anything else that is dangerous and likely to cause death to a person who might stumble. If, for instance, one has a well or a pit in his courtyard — — he must build an enclosing ring ten handbreadths high, or put a cover over it, so that a person should not fall into it and die. So too, any obstruction that is a danger to life must be removed as a matter of positive duty and extremely necessary caution.

# Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 427: 8

Likewise, one has a positive duty to remove and guard oneself of any life-threatening obstacle, as it is said "beware and guard your soul". If one did not remove said obstacles, one has cancelled a positive commandment and transgressed "do not bring bloodguilt" (Deut. 22:8).

# Exodus 22:1-2

If the thief is seized while tunneling and is beaten and dies, there is no bloodguilt. If the sun has risen on him, there is bloodguilt.

# Sanhedrin 72a

Rava says: What is the reason for this halakha concerning a burglar who breaks into a house? He explains: There is a presumption that a person does not restrain himself when faced with losing his money, and therefore this burglar must have said to himself: If I go in and the owner sees me, he will rise against me and not allow me to steal from him, and if he rises against me, I will kill him. And the Torah stated a principle: If someone comes to kill you, rise and kill him first.

The Sages taught: The verses state: “If a burglar is found breaking in, and is smitten and dies, there shall not be blood shed on his account. If the sun is risen upon him, there shall be blood shed on his account” (Exodus 22:1–2). But did the sun rise only upon him? Rather, if the matter is as clear to you as the sun that the burglar is not coming to you in peace, but rather his intention is to kill you, arise and kill him first. But if you are not sure about his intentions, do not kill him.

**Can We Arm Non-Jews?**

# Avodah Zara 15b-16a

One should not sell them either weapons or accessories of weapons, nor should one grind any weapon for them, nor may one sell them either stocks or neck-chains or ropes, or iron chains — neither to idolaters nor Samaritans. Now, what is the reason? Shall we say because they are suspected of murder? But are they suspect, seeing we have just said that one may be alone with them! Hence it is only because he might sell it to an idolater.

R. Dimi b. Abba said: Just as it is forbidden to sell to an idolater, so it is forbidden to sell to a robber who is an Israelite. What are the circumstances? If he is suspected of murder, then it is quite plain; he is the same as an idolater! If he has never committed murder, why not sell them to him? — It refers indeed to one who has not committed murder; but we may be dealing here with a cowardly thief who is apt at times when caught to save himself by committing murder.

Said R. Adda b. Ahabah: One should not sell them bars of iron. Why? Because they may hammer weapons out of them. If so, spades and pick-axes too! Said R. Zevid: We mean Indian iron. Why then do we sell it now? Said R. Ashi: [We sell it] to the Persians who protect us.

# Mishneh Torah, Murderer and the Preservation of Life 12:12-13

It is forbidden to sell arms of any kind to gentiles; one should not sharpen their weapons; one should not sell them a knife or anything that is likely to be a public danger. Shields, however, may be sold to them, since they are used only for defense.

Just as the sages have prohibited the sale of arms to a gentiles, so have they prohibited selling the same to a Jew who sells to a gentile. On the other hand, weapons may be sold to the local citizens' force, since they protect the Jewish population.

# Mishneh Torah, Foreign Worship and Customs of the Nations 9:8-9

Even as it is forbidden to sell to idolaters things which uphold their hands to idolatry so it is forbidden to sell them things wherein there is a menace to the public, for instance, bears, lions, weapons, iron fetters, and chains; it is likewise forbidden to sharpen their weapons for them. And, everything which is forbidden to sell to an idolater is also forbidden to sell to an Israelite who is under suspicion that he might resell it to an idolater. It is likewise forbidden to sell instruments of harm to robbers who profess to be Israelites.

Israelites living among idolatrous neighbors, with whom they made a covenant of peace, are permitted to sell weapons to the king's servants and militia, because they conduct war therewith against the country's enemies to save it, as a consequence whereof they protect the Israelites who dwell among them. A city wherein there is an established house of idolatry, one is permitted to pass by it without its boundaries, but is forbidden to enter it; if the idolatry is established without its boundaries he may enter it.

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There is one exception to the general prohibition concerning sale of weapons to non-Jews. The Gemara, Avodah Zarah 16a, explicitly permits sale of weapons "to the Persians who protect us." Hilkhot Avodah Zarah 9:8 explains that it is permitted to sell armaments to "the servants of the king and his soldiers because they wage war against the enemies of the state in order to preserve it; hence they protect us since we dwell among them." Similarly, in Hilkhot Rozeaḥ 12:13, Rambam declares that it is permitted to sell arms to "the army of the populace of the state because they protect Israel." This provision is also recorded in Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 151:6. This exemption from the general prohibition is thus predicated upon the general consideration of self-defense. Actions which are otherwise prohibited are permitted if necessary to preserve life. A suitably equipped army, militia and police force is necessary to preserve law and order and to protect against the enemy. Hence sale of weapons to forces charged with protecting the public is permitted as a legitimate form of self-defense.