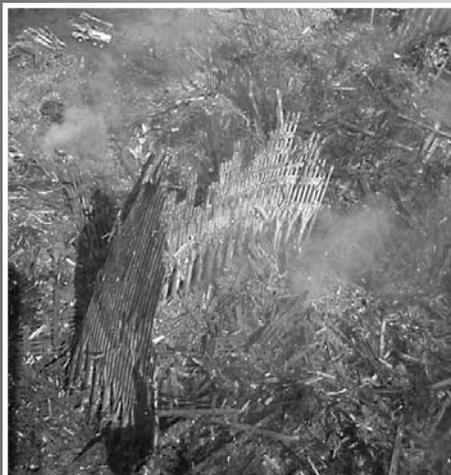




The Need for Active Self-Defense

Frank Pomeranz

Venice, Florida



On March 6, 2008, a lone gunman entered the Mercaz Harav Yeshivah in Jerusalem, killing eight students and wounding

eleven others, of which five were left in serious to critical condition. The attack lasted fourteen minutes before the intruder was killed by two IDF soldiers, former students of the yeshivah, who lived nearby. With proper planning and an active self-defense posture, this attack could have lasted less than fourteen seconds!

On April 23, 2008, the Chabad House on Wheels in Miami Beach was burned to the ground. Sections of the Torah were found charred on the floor, but the rest of the holy scroll was missing. Local police considered this a crime scene; it was not caused by an accidental fire.

In November 2008, we endured the horrible attack and killings at the Rohr Chabad House in Mumbai, India.

On June 10, 2009, an 88-year-old Nazi with a rifle walked into the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and began shooting. He killed a 39-year-old security guard and wounded many others.

The magnitude of these four events should not be compared to spray-painting graffiti on the walls of a synagogue or knocking over headstones in a Jewish cemetery. The taking of innocent Jewish lives and the

massive destruction of property is not equivalent to lesser acts of anti-Semitism. We must be able to effectively respond to the possibility of a greater threat posed by modern day terrorists and intruders. I no longer accept the premise that our lives and property can be safeguarded by avoiding the issue.

Unfortunately, the Chabad community is not adequately prepared to defend all of its synagogues, yeshivos and other institutions. True, we rely on G-d and spiritual means of protection, such as tzedakah and mezuzos. Yet, we need to take physical steps to protect ourselves as well. Prayer and self-defense are both necessary, active pursuits.

Ideally, every Chabad House should have its own "warrior." Warriors instinctively protect victims. A warrior undergoes the necessary transition to prepare for an unforeseen eventuality. A warrior may have a law enforcement, military or intelligence background or just be a concerned private citizen. With proper focus, training and weapons, a warrior can quickly and effectively respond to a possible intruder. A warrior is a defender of innocent life and property.

Since my bar mitzvah just over 50 years ago, I have led a mostly secular life. Yet, recently, I was drawn into the world of Orthodox Judaism, Torah, Kabbalah, Tanya, and videos of the Rebbe. This religious pursuit and belief in Hashem greatly enhanced my transformational process.

My journey back to Judaism

started just four years ago, when a young Chabad couple, Rabbi Sholom and Rebbetzin Chaya Rivka Schmerling, held their first open house in the Venice, Florida, area. Quite simply, the ground shifted beneath me! I am now a proud Jew and strongly pro-Israel. I have training in martial arts and weaponry, with a focus on group and personal security, which I am committed to using to help protect the Jewish community.

The world has also changed dramatically in the past four years. The threat of a nuclear Iran has grown dramatically, now enhanced by a United States president who would place Israel at greater risk to further his own unsustainable agenda in the Middle East.

Before Chabad, what I really understood about Judaism could fit into a thimble. I was searching for a way to cast my spiritual vote for the world to come. I do not think that mankind, left to its own resources, will ever solve the problem of terrorism or live together in complete harmony. We simply have to prepare ourselves to survive as best we can until the day Moshiach reveals himself.

The New York City Police Department has recently briefed Jewish leaders about their elite Hercules commando units prepared to fan out across the city in full battle gear to make a show of force in front of the Israeli consulate, banks and synagogues... all potential targets. Obviously, the NYPD expects a more serious anti-Semitic backlash if Israel again has to defend herself militarily and would use this tactic as a possible deterrent. But these roving commando units will not stay long enough to provide ongoing security in any one location.

In addition to the reaction to military actions that Israel may take to defend herself, there are two other reasons why Jews might come under



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Leah Paley at target practice

threat.

These are the deteriorating economic conditions and high Muslim fertility and immigration rates.

The renowned forecaster, Gerald Celente, president of Trends Research Institute, is predicting a failed recovery in 2010 leading to an even more severe recession. Mr. Celente observes that we have fallen into a moral and economic vacuum unlike any other time in American history. The dot com bubble was solved by inflating the economy with lower interest rates, which contributed to the real estate bubble. This has now induced a global financial crisis leading to the bailout bubble, which has the potential to destroy the infrastructure of America. Mr. Celente further states, "When people have lost everything, they have nothing to lose. Violence and crime will explode."

When reason and hope go out the window, which group becomes a convenient target of a weak-minded, scared population? Again, it's the Jews!

A recent report on the world's changing demographics shows that immigration and fertility rates of Muslims are much higher than the non-Muslim populations across Europe. In the United States and Canada, the trend is the same. If the present trend continues, within five to seven years it is likely that Islam will be the dominant religion in the world.

This dramatic increase in the percentage of the global Muslim population, along with social and political influence, will likely further embolden the jihadist element that wants to spread Sharia law, by force if necessary.

Of course, not all anti-Semitism is directed specifically toward Chabad Center or Orthodox Jews, but we do make a convenient target due to our global commitment and outreach philosophy. In addition, after the Chabad House was targeted in Mumbai, some security experts have noted that other

Guns Save Lives

Leah Paley

As a child born to parents of the 60s, I grew up in an anti-war, anti-gun environment. Guns equaled evil. My mom used to tell me, "Guns kill people." My brother never played Cops & Robbers, or Cowboys & Indians, for one simple reason – there were no guns in our house. Not even a toy gun. So it was no surprise that when I had my kids, guns were not among their many toys. Imagine my horror, then, when on his first day of preschool, my two-year-old son came home and immediately showed me what he had learned. He took three Duplos and stuck them together, two smaller ones in a stack on the bottom of one longer one and voila! He had a toy gun.

Over the years, I heard various requests from my children. "Can I have a water gun?" "What about a cap gun?" Always the same answer, "No, not in my house." However, I did give in to my in-laws and allowed them to buy my son toy guns to play with while he was staying in their house.

Fast forward to this past presidential election. One night I was reading about how each candidate felt about various issues. The question of gun control came up.

"Q: Is the D.C. law prohibiting ownership of handguns consistent with an individual's right to bear arms?"

Whoa, wait a second! There is a law in Washington, DC, preventing ownership of a handgun? I was intrigued to find out that there are several places in the country where owning a handgun is illegal, and that one of the then-candidates felt that this was acceptable under the U.S. Constitution. That didn't seem right to me. I started doing more research on the subject, and was even more surprised to find the reasoning behind these laws ... If you prevent homeowners from having guns, you will prevent the criminals from getting them in the first place. (I think their faulty reasoning is that robbers break into houses and steal the legal handguns.)

This started me on a quest for information that I had never imagined I would go on. I read the second amendment of the United States Constitution carefully, and began reading studies regarding the effects of gun control laws. What I found shocked me and turned my world upside down. The cities with the strictest gun control laws have the highest crime rates. Think of the cities which have bans on owning a handgun – New York City; Chicago; Washington, DC. They also have the highest crime rates in the whole country. If someone has no regard for the laws of not rob-

acts of terrorism could be directed towards our centers due to a copycat effect.

There are at least two scenarios that could lead to the potential loss of innocent Jewish life. The first is the premeditated threat from a foreign or domestic terrorist cell. The other threat could come from an enraged citizen who has the means and misplaced motive to launch an ill-prepared lone gunman attack. The sign outside our building that says "Chabad Jewish Center" could act as a magnet to bring trouble to our front door, G-d forbid!

It's not my intent to stand on a soapbox and shout, "Be afraid. Be very afraid!" Just the opposite; I want to act and inspire others to act, and thus *decrease* fear. To do nothing would actually cause greater concern.

Prayer empowers me to take action and actively prepare for any eventuality. I pray that Hashem will give me the wisdom to stay calm under duress and make the correct decisions, should the need ever arise for me to draw my weapon in defense of innocent Jewish lives.

At our Chabad Center we recently played a film, "Hiding and Seeking: Faith and Tolerance After the Holocaust." It tells the story of a father's desire to impart the values to his yeshivah-attending sons that he learned from his father and uncles who were sheltered by a non-Jewish Polish family during the Holocaust.

Apparently, his sons held the opinion that they must do acts of kindness only for other Jews. This did not sit well with their father, so they all traveled back to Poland together to trace this part of their family's history. The story is fascinating and I urge

"Think the unthinkable, and you'll have a better chance of survival."

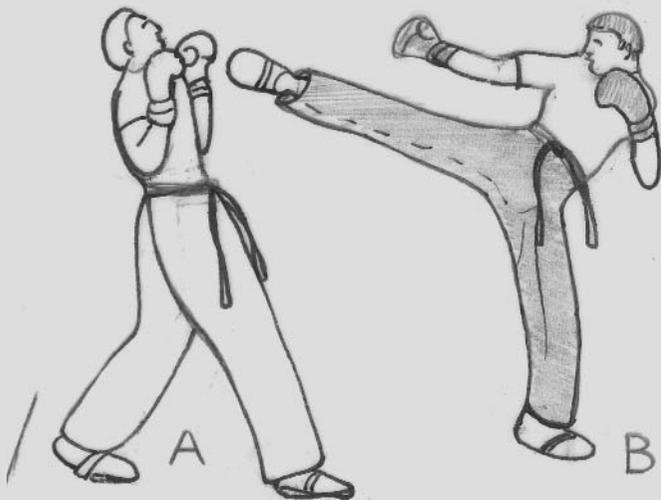


Leah Paley at target practice

bing, not hurting people, and not murdering, they are certainly not going to follow the law of not owning a handgun. In fact, the citizens who legally own their guns tend to be the most law abiding citizens, scrupulously following the laws set upon them.

I have always been someone who takes the rights given to me in our Constitution and Bill of Rights very seriously. I have voted in nearly every election since I turned 18. I enjoy my right to free speech, and especially love our freedom of religion. With the election of Barak Hussein Obama, I was a little fearful that maybe the right to own a gun might eventually be taken away from us. (This was based on the fact that everything he said and did was anti-gun rights.) I wanted to exercise this right while it was still available to me.

With this in mind, I set out for my local shooting range. A friend offered me a practical piece of advice – start small. So I arrived at the range, and for the first time in my life, I stood there trying to decide which gun I wanted to use. I picked a semi-automatic .22. The workers at the range were extremely helpful, showing me how to load the gun and how to aim, and they gave me some pointers. I was sent off to the range with a cheerful wave and a smile, and a nice “Have



fun!” My whole body shook as I loaded 10 bullets into the gun. Even though it was January, I wasn't shivering from the cold. I shook with fear, knowing I had a lethal weapon in my hand. I gave up after 15 rounds, although I was quite proud of myself for actually doing it. (I joked that my hands were no longer innocent.)

I returned the next week, and the next week and even the next one after that. I worked my way up from that little .22 to a 9 mm and then finally settled on a Smith and Wesson .357. I was hooked! I wanted a gun for personal protection. I liked the look and feel, and learned to control it very nicely. Next in my quest was to actually buy a gun. It seems that the one I wanted was back-ordered everywhere. I finally found it at an online auction site. Before you assume that just anyone can buy a gun online, let me point this out ... The

you to discover
it for yourselves. His sons eventually learned that kindness can be shared by people of goodwill across cultural and religious boundaries. We must continually spread light unto the nations and act with goodness and kindness. However, if a person poses a threat to innocents, the good, kind and righteous thing to do is to stop him through whatever means are necessary.

When I first approached my rabbi about wearing a gun to synagogue, he wanted me to keep it hidden from others. Having a concealed weapons permit requires me to do just that. Some of the liberally minded men in shul thought it was unnecessary, but soon came around to feeling more comfortable with the idea. It actually surprised me that Chabad women adjusted more quickly than the men to this reality. I recently had the opportunity to speak with a local sheriff's deputy about this subject, and his response was that today an armed person should be posted inside every synagogue. Unfortunately, when every second counts, the police will arrive just a few minutes later.

You may ask, “How does this involve my center or yeshivah?” The wise thing to do is pray for the best and plan for the worst. Just because you may not be in a major urban area does not mean that you are necessarily immune to a pre-planned or random attack. Ben Sherwood, author of “The Survivor's Club,” recently commented, “Think the unthinkable, and you'll have a better chance of survival.” If you still choose to take no action whatsoever, does your sense of confidence come with a written guarantee? Of course not!

If you can afford an armed guard service this is a major first step. But it's not wise to rely solely on a hired service because they may not be that thorough in their preparation or that committed to protecting your group more than themselves. They are a first line, but by no means a final line, of self-defense. The same can be said for a police officer stationed nearby.

Rabbis should organize the men in the synagogue or yeshivah. Rebbetzins should speak with the women. Elicit their support in this endeavor, and see who has the interest, training or background to take on this added responsibility. Bear in mind that being the designated defender of a shul or yeshivah is a very responsible undertaking and requires training.

I urge all Shluchim and heads of institutions to think carefully about the security needs of their organization. I have compiled extensive tips to guide shul members in providing armed self-defense. You can find this information on my website, ChabadSecurity.net, or contact me via e-mail, info@chabadsecurity.net.

Please allow ChabadSecurity.Net and these thoughts to be your personal, ongoing resource. This is a call for action to overcome any remaining apathy that prevents you from developing your capability for an active self-defense. Now is the time to enhance our warrior mentality throughout the worldwide Chabad community. ■

gun can only ship to an authorized dealer who runs all the usual background checks.

My in-laws think it is so funny how I have turned 180 degrees on this issue. I have gone from being totally against to being pro gun ownership. I did take my kids to the shooting range. One daughter wanted nothing to do with it. My boys loved it. Our range offers a private safety class for children. It teaches them basic gun safety, and actually takes them onto the range where they get to use both a semi-automatic and a revolver.

My gun sits in a special gun safe, fully loaded with extra ammo. I sleep a little better knowing I have protection. I also took an intensive nine-hour class on gun safety. After passing this class, I was able to apply for my concealed handgun permit. I am in the process of trying to decide what type of gun I want to carry on my person. It is a hard decision, because I want to make sure it is small and light, but big enough to have good stopping power. Recently, I was asked, "Why do you feel you need to have a gun?" I don't live in a high crime area. However, a short while ago, there was an incident a few houses away in which a young lady was kidnapped at gun point.

The economy is taking a turn for the worse, and unfortunately, it is known that at times like these crime rates tend to go up. I want to know that if chas v'sholom something happens, my family will be protected. Last week, at a local convenience store, a guy walked in and shot the owner twice. He then tried to round up the other patrons, but met with an unexpected surprise. One of them was armed, and his quick action saved many lives. Surveillance footage shows that this robber aimed his gun several times at innocent people. It was an armed citizen who saved the lives of the other shoppers.

Sadly, the places that need armed protection the most are sorely lacking it. I teach at our local Chabad Hebrew School. The front door is open to allow the kids to come in and parents to go out. After what happened in Mumbai, I am scared. I want to make sure nothing like that happens, chas v'sholom, in our Chabad House. However, state law prohibits me from bringing my loaded gun into the class (even if it is strapped to me in a holster or in my pocket book). What good would my gun be, locked in my car?

On April 2, 2009, Nicole and Ben Goeser were eating in a restaurant in Nashville, TN. Although Nicole had a concealed weapons permit, she had to leave her gun locked in her car during dinner. The law on the books at that time prohibited concealed handgun permit holders from carrying their gun into a restaurant that serves liquor. Ben was gunned down right before Nicole's eyes while she sat there, helpless to do anything. (Nicole was instrumental in changing this law, but it won't bring back her husband.)

Time and time again, if you search carefully, you can find stories that get buried in the news. The truth about guns is this – GUNS SAVE LIVES. Criminals think twice

about entering a home if they know there is a chance that they will be looking down the barrel of a gun. Think of all the people the brave guard of the National Holocaust Museum saved by shooting the crazed lunatic. It is too horrifying to think what might have happened had those guards been sitting there with nothing more than a "please don't shoot us" that day. Those cities that have taken the guns away from home owners have left them sitting ducks. According to the book, *The Bias Against Guns*, by John R. Lott Jr., the homicide bombers in Eretz Yisroel originally tried shooting people in a busy Yerushalayim area. After their first attempt, they gave up. Why? Too many Israeli citizens are armed. It was that realization that led them to the truly bizarre and against-human-nature practice of strapping bombs to themselves.

There is a bumper sticker among gun advocates: When seconds count, the police are only minutes away. Interestingly enough, Jews are usually the ones who are the pacifists. It was the Jews in Germany who urged others to give up their guns when the Nazis (*yemach shemom*) started to disarm citizens. It is not something that is usually talked about, but given the situation in the world, I don't think it would hurt for all of us to become familiar with how to work a gun, and to become gun owners ourselves. I do realize that if Rivky and Gabi (HY"D) had had guns it wouldn't have helped them. (The pictures I saw of the terrorists were horrifying. They had bullet proof vests and automatic weapons and a lot of clips with extra ammunition.) However, I do feel that against a single gunman, a homeowner, a Chabad House or a school should be able to fight back.

And my kids now? Do I let them play with guns? No. Because guns are not toys. I don't like the idea of them running around and pretending to shoot someone. I want them to respect and appreciate the gun for what it is, a valuable tool to be used for the preservation of human life. ■

