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"Should Jews be for or against the right to bear arms?"

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

As Gilda Ratner might have said in her persona as Roseanne Rosennadanna, "What's all the fuss I hear about bearing arms? Why can't people walk around in shortsleeve shirts? Put on some lotion, get a little tan, what's the big deal?"

She would stand corrected, of course, if she were to be told that "bearing arms" had to do with owning weapons and not the garments we wear. And she would then wonder why it is such a big deal that we can't allow people to own guns but also put in place better controls and background checks and limit the types of guns that ordinary citizens ought to be allowed to purchase.

Traditional Jewish teaching inveighed against hunting and causing unnecessary cruelty to animals. But classical Jewish law also says that if someone breaks into your house, you have a right to defend yourself. At the same time, the principle of self-defense isn't limitless and the village dog still must be tied up by day because of the liability associated with letting it roam free.

Of course, John Lennon could imagine a day when there would be "nothing to kill or die for" and Isaiah, long before him, could prophesy a time when "they shall beat their swords into plowshares." But until those days ever come bearing arms and doing so responsibly will continue to be a big deal.