

NJ ‘Gun Rabbi’ teaches Torah of self-defense

Jews need to rethink their relationship with firearms, says Bendory

by [Ron Kaplan](#)
NJJN Features Editor

June 15, 2011

Rabbi Dovid Bendory has the training and credentials of a conventional Orthodox rabbi, albeit one with an organizer’s flare. He’s the founder of Pidyon, an educational organization committed to spirituality and a teacher of *kashrut* for the Shema Yisrael Torah Network.

You certainly do *not* think his business card would identify him as “The Gun Rabbi.”



But according to his website — thegunrabbi.com — Bendory is a “Certified NRA Instructor and Range Safety Officer” who “offers practical instruction in firearms safety and shooting accompanied by the religious and ethical insights on personal defense that only an Orthodox Rabbi can provide.”

Rabbi Dovid Bendory, aka The Gun Rabbi, gives firearms instruction at a June 12 fundraiser sponsored by the Golani Rifle and Pistol Club. Photo by Ron Kaplan

So it was that about 50 people — including a handful of women — plunked down \$120 each to join Bendory at Gun for Hire, a shooting range in Belleville, for a lesson in firearms mixed with a passionate defense of Israel.

The June 12 event benefited the One Israel Fund and was sponsored by the Golani Rifle and Pistol Club, a Teaneck-based organization established in 2001 by a group of Orthodox Jews who wanted to have a Sabbath-observant venue for shooting, according to the club’s acting president (who requested not to be identified).

Bendory, who lives in Livingston and is a member of Congregation Etz Chaim, instructed guests on the fundamentals of gun safety and operation before they split into smaller groups. (A show of hands indicated that about three-quarters of the participants had experience with firearms; several had brought weapons with them.)

One group went across the street to the actual firing range, squeezing into individual lanes to shoot at targets depicting attackers.

The remaining group listened to a presentation by Marc Prowisor, director of security for the One Israel Fund, which, according to its website, raises funds for Jewish settlers in Judea and Samaria as well as Jews displaced by Israel’s evacuation of Gaza. Prowisor spoke about the murders of

members of the Fogel family in Itamar in March and the need for continued vigilance for the protection of the settlements.

As guests noshed on hot dogs and hamburgers, Bendory discussed his “evolution” with *NJ Jewish News*.

His interest in Jewish security issues began after the 9/11 attacks.

“I started seeing events in the world change,” he said. “I started asking questions on Halacha [Jewish law]: What does Halacha have to say to me about firearms as a means of self-defense? So I spent some time in the Talmud and learned that Halacha has a very clear message.... Basically, your life is a gift from God and if someone tries to take it away from you, you have an obligation to try to prevent that.”

Bendory, 43, chose his words carefully when discussing what he called “liberal Jewish Democrats” who advocate gun control.

“Jews have a very long history of being at the wrong end of a gun barrel,” he said. “When we think about guns we think about them being used against us. We have a tendency not to think about the gun as an incredibly valuable defensive tool. In a world where you have arrests in New York City of, quote unquote, ‘home-grown terrorists’ who are buying guns to go have shootings in synagogues, in a world where you have a shooting at the Holocaust Museum in Washington and the JCC in Seattle and the JCC in LA — and I could go on and on — the reality is that for certain kind of attacks, the handgun is the best defensive weapon we have.”

Bendory’s mission, he said, “is to get Jews to rethink their relationship with firearms.”

He noted the dichotomy between American and Israeli Jews.

“We look with pride at Israeli soldiers and the Israeli army’s ability to defend the country, but we would never think about such things for ourselves. I’m not sure what the root and origins of that are, but I find that most Jews, if you can get them to actually think about the issues, are not as anti-gun as they thought they were.”

Bendory proffered a DVD of *No Guns for Jews* and asked a reporter to “look at it with an open mind.” Bendory is the featured speaker in the documentary, produced under the aegis of Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership. It argues how countries — most notably Nazi Germany — have victimized Jews in part by forbidding them from owning weapons. In the film, Bendory muses about the outcome of the Warsaw uprising — and perhaps the Holocaust — had more Jews and Polish partisans had the means and will to fight back.

“What would have been if they had a few hundred guns and a few hundred people willing to pick them up?” he asked.

Bendory said such threats against Jews on American soil “are not quite active,” but warned, “They’re getting there.”

None of the participants at the Golani event was prepared to talk to a reporter on the record about their interest in guns — but when it came to fending off other threats, they looked ready.