

Lo Ta'amod al Dam Reyecha
To What Extent Do We Go to Save Lives?
Should Israel Intervene in the Syrian Genocide?

Teacher's Guide

Saving lives is one of the most basic and obvious acts of human goodness, and is of paramount importance in Jewish practice. Moreover, the Torah considers saving lives an absolute obligation, and not merely a "good deed." But how far does the obligation to save lives extend? In this shiur we will examine a passage of the Talmud about saving lives and explore some of the Talmudic literature that answers such **key questions** as:

- To what extent is a bystander obligated to take proactive measures to save a life?
- Do I have to endanger myself to save someone else who is in danger?
- Should Israel intervene to prevent further genocide in Syria?

Class Outline

Section I. The Obligation to Save Human Life

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Case 4. The Turkish Earthquake Volunteer – Can You Endanger Yourself to Save Another?

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Note: This shiur it is not intended as a source of practical *halachic* (legal) rulings. For matters of *halachah* (practical details of Jewish law), please consult a qualified *posek* (rabbi).

Section I. The Obligation to Save Lives

One may think that the moral ethic of saving lives is universal, but do we always see that in practice?

Case 1. The Bystander Effect and the Mitzvah to Save a Life – Minimal Effort

In April 2010, Hugo Alfredo Tale-Yax was a thirty-one-year-old man who had jumped to the aid of a woman attacked on 144th Street at 88th Road in Jamaica, NY at 5:40 AM. In attempting to save her life, he chased the assailant, but was stabbed. He collapsed onto the sidewalk.

An hour and twenty minutes later his dead body was accidentally found by firefighters, who were responding to another 911 call for a non-life-threatening injury. A shocking surveillance video revealed that as Mr. Tale-Yax lay in the street, nearly twenty-five people indifferently strolled past him. Some of the passersby paused to stare at Hugo Alfredo Tale-Yax last Sunday morning and others leaned down to look at his face.

In the wake of the attack, a man came out of a nearby building and took a cellphone photo of the victim before leaving. And in several instances, pairs of people gawked at Tale-Yax without doing anything.

Policemen said they received four 911 calls at around the time of the attack reporting a woman screaming, but found nothing. They received no other 911 calls.

(Based on an April 25, 2010 New York Post article)

In 1968, social science researchers John Darley and Bibb Latané coined the term “bystander effect” for such cases where onlookers do not come to the aid of a victim. In fact, they discovered that the more bystanders who witness an emergency, the less chance they will actually help out!

How does the Torah teach us to react if someone’s life is endangered?

Source 1. Sanhedrin 73a – We must attempt to save someone who is in danger.

From where do we know that one who sees someone drowning, being dragged by a wild animal, or being threatened by robbers, is bound to save him? We learn it from the verse (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:16), “Do not stand aside

מִיֵּן לְרוֹאֵה אֶת חֲבִירוֹ שֶׁהוּא
טוֹבֵעַ בְּנֶהָר אוֹ חֵיהַ גּוֹרְרָתוֹ אוֹ
לְסָטִין בָּאִין עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא חַיִּיב
לְהִצִּילוֹ? תִּלְמוּד לּוֹמֵר, “לֹא
תַעֲמוּד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ.”

when your fellow's blood is being shed.”	
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The Torah thus teaches that a person must not stand idly by when his fellow's blood – his life – is at stake. In one sentence, the Torah gives us a very clear directive. The Gemara interprets this verse as applying to bystanders witnessing an emergency situation or crime threatening someone's wellbeing.

What is the Jewish value that underlies this mitzvah? It is based on the following Talmudic observation explaining why God created the animal kingdom in pairs, yet mankind, Adam, was created alone:

Source 2. Sanhedrin 37a – Saving one life is comparable to saving the whole world.

Therefore man was created alone, to teach you that anyone who destroys one life is considered by the Torah as if he has destroyed the entire world, and anyone who preserves one life is considered by the Torah as if he has preserved the entire world.	<p>לְפִיכֶן נִבְרָא אָדָם יְחִידִי, לְלַמְּדֶךָ שְׂכָל הַמְּאַבֵּד נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כְּאִילוֹ אֲבָד עוֹלָם מְלֵא, וְכָל הַמְּקַיִים נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כְּאִילוֹ קִים עוֹלָם מְלֵא.</p>
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On account of the infinite value of a human life, we are prohibited from standing by when somebody's life is endangered; there is a proactive obligation to save him. **Does this depend on the expected duration or quality of the life in question?**

Source 3. Rabbi Akiva Tatz, M.D., Dangerous Disease and Dangerous Therapy in Jewish Medical Ethics , Targum Press 2010, p. 33 – Judaism recognizes the primary importance of the value of life.

<p>In the hierarchy of Torah values, the saving of life is a priority. It supersedes virtually all other obligations and mandates virtually unlimited effort...</p> <p><i>(i) even where the risk to life is small or unclear – virtually any risk to life mandates extreme effort to avert that risk;</i></p> <p><i>(ii) even where there is no guarantee that the life at risk will be saved – even a small chance of success mandates extreme effort to save that life;</i></p> <p><i>and even when (i) and (ii) co-exist; that is, where the risk to life is small or indefinite and where success is unlikely in the event that the risk turns out to be real;</i></p> <p><i>(iii) even where the life to be saved is of “low quality”;</i></p>
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(iv) even where the life to be saved is expected to be of short duration; and even when (iii) and (iv) co-exist; that is where a life of very poor quality can be extended only for a very short period.

The obligation to save a life applies to everybody – not merely to doctors, nurses, police and firefighters. Whoever can be of assistance must do so, each of course according to his means. Sometimes, a phone call is all one can do; sometimes, meeting one’s duty will require greater effort and sacrifice.

Case 2. The Blood Drive – Moderate Effort

The Hillel director at Hartley University had to undergo emergency surgery Sunday evening. Rina and Sara set up a Sunday blood drive. Because the director’s blood type is rare, finding appropriate donors was not an easy task. Late in the day, still in need of more donations, they found themselves trying hard to convince Miri, who has the right blood type, to donate. But Miri objected, explaining that she gets extremely queasy around blood, and once even fainted after donating blood. Besides, she said, she would be having a very important final the next morning and was on her way to the library to study. She felt it was not fair for them to pressure her into doing something that should be left up to her personal discretion.

Can you make a case for Miri not having to give blood?

Can you come up with a reason that it is not just nice for her to give, but that she must?

The Talmud (the continuation of Source 1) points to a second biblical source that serves as the basis for the obligation to save endangered lives.

Let’s keep a question in the back of our minds: **Why would the Torah include two separate verses to teach the same principle?** The answer will be the key to solving Miri’s dilemma...

Source 4. Sanhedrin 73a – One must exert effort to save lives.

Question: Is the imperative to save a life really derived from [Vayikra 19:16], “**Do not stand aside** when your fellow’s blood is being shed?” Is it not derived from the following teaching [Baba Kama 81b] – “What is the source that one must restore another’s body if it is in danger of being lost? The Torah teaches us this by saying, ‘**You should**

וְהָא מְהֵכָא נְפָקָא ? ! מְהֵתָם
 נְפָקָא [בבא קמא פא:] : “אֲבִדְתָּ
 גּוֹפּוֹ מִנִּין תִּלְמוּד לֹאמַר
 יְהִשְׁבְּתוּ לוֹ.”

<p>return it (not only his lost object but also his endangered body) to him' (Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:2)? ”</p> <p>The answer is: If we had learned the obligation to save an endangered person only from the verse, "You should return it to him," I might have mistakenly thought that my responsibility is limited only to when I can save someone by myself, but there is no necessity to exert oneself and hire others. The Torah, therefore, writes the verse [Vayikra 19:16], "Do not stand aside..." [which teaches a greater level of responsibility for saving lives, by hiring others to do so, when I am personally unable].</p>	<p>אי מהתם יהיה אמינא הני מילי בנפשיה אבל מיטרח ומיגר אגורי אימא לא. קא משמע לן.</p>
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The obligation to save another's life can be derived from the obligation to return lost property. If a person is obligated to prevent another from losing his property, it stands to reason that he is certainly obligated to ensure that he won't lose his life. Even so, the Torah records a specific obligation to save a life, “**Do not stand aside** when your fellow's blood is being shed. This "extra" instruction teaches us that a person is required to make an effort and go out of his way to do so, including hiring others to save a life. (See below, Section II, concerning making a personal financial sacrifice).

(The Torah still needs to state the verse of, 'You should return it to him' [Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:2], to teach the general responsibility of returning lost objects.)

The idea of saving a life, including making considerable effort, is ruled by the Shulchan Aruch.

Source 5. Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 426:1 – Our Gemara is quoted as halachah.

<p>(a) One who saw another drowning, or threatened by robbers or by a wild animal, and could have either saved him himself or hired others to save</p>	<p>הרואה את חבירו טובע בים או ליסטים באין עליו או חיה רעה באה עליו, ויכול להצילו הוא בעצמו או שישכר אחרים</p>
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<p>him – and he did not – or (b) someone who heard that gentiles or informers are plotting against someone or preparing to entrap him – and he did not reveal this to his friend and tell him – or (c) someone who knew that a gentile or violent man was approaching his friend, and he could have appeased him and changed his attitude towards his friend – and he did not appease him – in all such situations, he has transgressed, “Do not stand aside when your fellow's blood is being shed.”</p>	<p>לְהִצִּיל וְלֹא הִצִּיל, או שְׁשָׁמַע עֲבוּרִים או מוֹסְרִים מִחֻשְׁבֵּים עָלָיו רָעָה או טוֹמְנִים לוֹ פֶּחַ וְלֹא גִילָה אֶזְנָן חֲבִירוֹ וְהוֹדִיעוּ, או שִׁדְעָה בְּעֵבֶר או בְּאִנְשֵׁי הַיָּם כִּי עַל חֲבִירוֹ וְיָכוֹל לְפִיסוֹ בְּגִלְלָה חֲבִירוֹ וְלִהְיוֹת מִה שֶׁבָּלְבוּ וְלֹא פָּיְסוֹ וְכִי יֵצֵא בְּדַבָּרִים אֵלָיו, עֲבַר עַל לֹא תַעֲמוּד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ.</p>
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(See also the Rambam's Laws of Murder and Saving Life 1:14)

Based on these principles, it appears clear that Miri should donate blood to save a life, even if this involves an unwanted experience of discomfort.

The following episode illustrates to what extent people go to save lives. In the Suri Feldman case, a large group of people left the comfort of home and family for an extended time to search for a 14-year-old who had disappeared in a forest. Here we see the Torah's instructions in action.

Case 3. The Suri Feldman Case – Extensive Personal Effort

“Brooklyn Girl is Found Safe in Woods in Massachusetts,”
Joseph Berger, www.nytimes.com

STURBRIDGE, Mass., May 6, 1994 – Displaying survival skills that impressed local people familiar with the outdoors, a 14-year-old Chasidic girl from Brooklyn who disappeared on Wednesday when a school outing in a Connecticut state park went awry was found today by the police in dense, swampy woods, frightened and tired but praying by the side of a tree.

Suri Feldman had carefully rationed her sandwiches so that they sustained her for the two days and two nights she was lost. She found ledges to keep her dry during occasional drizzles. When search helicopters flew overhead, she tried to signal them with the flash on her camera.

The thin, slight teenager had wandered along forest roads more than three miles from the point in Bigelow Hollow State Park where she became separated from her classmates. News that she was alive and well set off jubilation in her neighborhood in Brooklyn and by the mixture of black-suited and bearded Chasidim and local volunteers who had

searched the woods for her. At a firehouse that was the command center for the search, the Chasidim began dancing in a circle, holding high an umbrella-shielded Torah that they had brought in case they had to stay in the area during the Sabbath.

The searchers, more than 1,000 according to the police, had picked up clues – an empty container of kosher vanilla pudding, a fresh tissue – that Suri was alive and in the woods.

The search attracted more than 600 Chasidim from as far away as Montreal and Washington, bringing truckloads of kosher food that they shared with non-Jewish volunteers. “It says in the Bible that to save a life is to save the entire world,” said Isaac Fortgang of Boston, explaining why he traveled so far to help.

This episode exhibits the antithesis of the bystander effect, with hundreds of volunteers going to great efforts to attempt saving just one person.

Key Themes of Section I

- Saving lives is an obligation, not just a meritorious deed.
- Everyone is obligated, not just emergency personnel.
- We must avoid apathy and overcome feelings of discomfort, “not wanting to get involved,” and “someone else will take care of it,” and, of course, the bystander effect.
- Saving lives demands expending effort and sacrifice.
- Saving a person is akin to saving the entire world.
- Jewish medical ethics follows suit, instructing us to try to save a life even where the risk to life is small and chances of success are unlikely, and even when the life to be saved is of supposedly low quality and short duration.

Section II. Endangering Your Life to Save Others

So far we have seen that a person must make efforts and sacrifices to save a fellow life. Even money must be spent towards this purpose (see Section II of the NLE Thinking Gemara Shiur, *Lo Ta’amod al Dam Reyecha*). What, however, is the halachah where saving a life involves placing oneself in danger? Does one have to go so far as endangering oneself in order to save someone else’s life?

Case 4. The Turkish Earthquake Volunteer – Can You Endanger Yourself to Save Another?

Rob was invited in 1999 to join student teams traveling to Izmit, Turkey, to provide assistance immediately after an earthquake that registered 7.6 on the Richter scale. A number of students openly refused to join because of the danger involved. Besides fires, disease, and collapsing buildings, there is also a serious danger of aftershocks – smaller earthquakes that often unexpectedly follow a major quake.

*One particularly vocal student leader began convincing others **not to join rescue efforts**. He mentioned that a number of foreign helpers had already met their own deaths since the beginning of the earthquake rescue mission. He felt that not only are they not morally obligated to go, but that they are morally **prohibited** from going. “Who says,” he asks Rob, “I can put my own life at risk to save others?”*

How should Rob respond?

The question of risking one's life to save another's is the subject of an incident recorded in the Talmud Yerushalmi, and subsequently cited by rabbinic authorities.

Source 6. Yerushalmi Terumot 47a – Reish Lakish goes to save Rabbi Ami.

Rabbi Ami was kidnapped and held in Sifsifa. Rabbi Yonatan said, “Wrap up the dead in his sheet (meaning, there is no hope of saving him).” Rabbi Shimon son of Lakish said, “I will either kill or be killed. I am going and will release him by force.” Rabbi Shimon son of Lakish went and appeased the kidnappers, and they handed over Rabbi Ami.	רַבִּי אַמִּי אֵיתְצַד בְּסִיפְסִיפָה. אָמַר ר' יוֹנָתָן "כָּרַךְ הַמֵּת בְּסִדְיָנוּ." אָמַר ר' שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן לֵקִישׁ, "עַד דְּאַנָּא קְטִיל אַנָּא מְתָקְטִיל אַנָּא אַיִזִּיל וּמְשִׁיזִיב לֵיהּ בְּחֵילָא." אָזַל וּפְיִיסוֹן וַיִּתְּבוּנֵיהּ לֵיהּ...
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The story implies that Rabbi Shimon son of Lakish felt it was permissible to risk his life (“I’ll kill or be killed”) in order to save Rabbi Ami. Rabbi Yonatan did not stop Rabbi Shimon and seemed to condone the action – though his initial statement (“Wrap up the dead in his sheet”) implies that he did not obligate it.

The following source, however, derives that one is actually obligated to place oneself in danger for the sake of saving a life.

Source 7. Kesef Mishneh Laws of Murder and Saving Life 1:14 – Certain danger vs. possible danger.

<p>The Hagahot Maimoniyot writes, "... In the Yerushalmi they conclude that one is even obligated to enter into a possibly dangerous situation in order to save another." It seems that the reason for this is that the victim is in certain danger (he will certainly die), whereas the rescuer is only in possible danger.</p>	<p>כסף משנה הלכות רוצח ושמירת נפש א: יד כתב בהגהות מיימוניות, "... בירושלמי מסיק אפילו להכניס עצמו בספק סכנה חייב עד כאן לשונו. ונראה שהטעם מפני שהלה ודאי והוא ספק:</p>
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Yet, the Aruch Hashulchan points out that this approach was **not** preserved in normative halachah.

Source 8. Aruch Hashulchan Choshen Mishpat 426:4 – The Talmud Bavli argues against the Talmud Yerushalmi.

<p>The halachic authorities quoted the Yerushalmi as saying that one is obligated to enter a possibly dangerous situation in order to save another. The Rishonim (early authorities) left this out of the halachic codes, because it is clear from our Talmud that one is not obligated to endanger himself to save another. However, every situation must be dealt with in context, and one must weigh this matter extremely carefully and not be overprotective of oneself ... And anyone who saves one Jew is as if he saved a whole world.</p>	<p>ערוך השלחן חושן משפט תכו:ד הפוסקים הביאו בשם ירושלמי דחייב אדם להכניס את עצמו לספק סכנה כדי להציל חברו. והראשונים השמיטו זה מפני שבש"ס שלנו מוכח שאינו חייב להכניס את עצמו. ומיהו הפל לפי הענין ויש לשקול הענין בפלס ולא לשמור את עצמו יותר מדאי ... וכל המקיים נפש מישׂראל כאלו קים עולם מלא.</p>
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According to the Aruch Hashulchan there is dispute between the two Talmuds about whether to enter a possibly dangerous situation in order to save another from a clearly dangerous situation. Whereas Rabbi Shimon son of Lakish in the Yerushalmi endangered himself to save Rabbi Ami, a number of sources in the Babylonian Talmud indicate that one does not have to endanger oneself in saving another's life.

In fact, the different Talmudic sources bearing on this question are discussed by several authorities, and each specific source is disputed (see Shevet Mi-Yehudah,

Shaar 1, Chap. 9). However, it is possible that the absence of a source stating such an obligation is sufficient indication that no such obligation exists: Just as one is not obligated to give up one's life for the sake of saving another, so one need not place one's life at risk for the same purpose.

Indeed, in his Meshech Chachmah commentary on the Torah, Rabbi Meir Simchah of Dvinsk proves from the Torah itself that one is **not** obligated to endanger oneself to save another. After fleeing from Pharaoh, Moshe (Moses) was in Midian waiting to fulfill God's command to save the Jewish people. Pharaoh had previously attempted to kill Moshe after Moshe had smitten an Egyptian who was torturing a Jew. When God gave him the go-ahead to begin his mission, the verse offers an interesting addition.

Source 9. Meshech Chachmah Shemot (Exodus) 4:19 – There is proof from the Torah itself for the Bavli's approach.

<p>“Return to Egypt, for all the people that were trying to kill you have died.” – It is clear from here that if they were still alive, he (Moshe) would not have needed to go to take the people of Israel out of Egypt. Even though all of Israel would have needed him, he would not have been required to enter a dangerous situation.</p>	<p>”לך שׁוּב מִצְרַיִם כִּי מָתוּ כָּל הָאֲנָשִׁים הַמְּבַקְשִׁים אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ” - מוֹכַח דָּאֵם הָיָו חַיִּים הַמְּבַקְשִׁים אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא הָיָה צָרִיךְ לִילֵךְ לְהוֹצִיא בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם, אִךְ עַל פִּי שְׂכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל צָרִיכִים אֵלָיו אִינוֹ צָרִיךְ לְהִכְנִיס עֲצָמוֹ בְּסַכְנָה.</p>
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Thus, the question of placing oneself in potential danger in order to save someone else involves a dispute among different authorities.

What is the conceptual debate? What is behind these two approaches?

The Hagahot Maimoniyot explains his approach (based on the Yerushalmi) with the words “It seems that the reason for this is that the victim is in certain danger (he will certainly die), whereas the rescuer is only in possible danger.” We are presented with a conflict between two probable outcomes. Inactivity will result in the victim's certain death, whereas a rescue mission will only result in the rescuer's possible death. We must opt for the rescue mission.

What is the rationale behind the dissenting position? The Minchat Chinuch (Mitzvah 237) suggests the following:

With very few exceptions, mitzvot are not obligatory when they involve loss of life, even possible loss of life. This will include even the obligation of “Do not stand aside when your fellow's blood is being shed.”

The rule of "living by mitzvot" rather than "dying by mitzvot" appears in a Talmudic passage that cites a biblical source for eating on Yom Kippur when fasting would be life-threatening.

Source 10. Yoma 85b – Live by the mitzvot; do not die by them.

Said Rabbi Yehudah in the name of Shmuel, “If I had been there (when the earlier rabbis quoted biblical sources permitting transgressing a mitzvah to save a life), I would have said that my source is better than theirs: [You must only fulfill the mitzvot in order to] ‘Live by them,’ but not that you should die through them.”	אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל אִי הוּאֵי הֵתָם הָיָה אֲמִינָא דִּינִי עֲדִיפָא מְדִידָהוּ: “וְחַי בָּהֶם” וְלֹא שְׂיָמוּת בָּהֶם.
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Thus, even though the victim faces certain death, whereas the rescuer only faces possible death, the mitzvah of “do not stand aside when your fellow's blood is being shed” is not obligatory when it involves possible danger of death.

This, indeed, is the halachic ruling given by leading halachic authorities (see Radvaz, no. 1582, on the Rambam; Shulchan Aruch Harav, Nizkei Guf 7; Eliyah Rabbah 329:8).

How can someone favor his life over the victim's? The Talmud also says that if a person is threatened with the tragic choice, “Kill him or I will kill you!” he cannot kill the other, because “Who says your blood is redder than his?” If someone refrains from rescuing another, isn't he deciding that his blood is redder than the victim's?

The Minchat Chinuch (Mitzvah 237) quotes from Tosafot, who explain that in a situation of choice between one life and another, it is prohibited to **actively kill** to save one's own life. However, if someone ends up killing **passively** (“Let us throw you on him or we will kill you!”) he can let himself be saved. In our discussion the rescuer is **passively** refraining from saving, and not actively killing. Thus, there is no obligation upon him to risk his own life.

At the same time, the Aruch Hashulchan warned to be truthful and honest about defining danger, and to “not be overprotective of oneself.”

Key Themes of Section II

- **Must a person endanger his own life to save another whose life is in certain danger? According to some authorities this question involves a dispute between the two Talmuds.**
- **The Talmud Yerushalmi records an anecdote that implies that one should enter possible danger to save another who is now in certain danger – and a minority opinion rules this way.**
- **Most authorities rule, based on inferences from the Talmud Bavli and laws of protecting one’s own life, that one does not need to enter such a situation. If one is not obligated, it follows that he should not risk his own life, and this is the normative halachah.**

Section III. Savings Others from Genocide

Case 5. Should Israel Intervene in the Syrian Genocide?

Dozens Suffocate in Syria as Government Is Accused of Chemical Attack

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Dozens of Syrians choked to death after a suspected chemical attack struck the rebel-held suburb of Douma, east of Damascus, with aid groups on Sunday blaming President Bashar al-Assad’s government for the assault and Western governments expressing outrage.

Rescue workers in Syria reported finding at least 42 people dead in their homes from apparent suffocation, and antigovernment activists circulated videos of lifeless men, women and children sprawled out on floors and in stairwells, many with white foam coming from their mouths and nostrils.

The suspected chemical attack on a Syrian rebel stronghold near Damascus on Saturday was the latest in a string of similar deadly assaults, including one in 2013 that killed more than 1,400 and shocked the world’s conscience.

In September 2013, the United States and Russia reached an agreement that called for Syria’s arsenal of chemical weapons to be removed or destroyed by the middle of 2014.

(The Geneva Protocol of 1925 banned the use of chemical weapons in war but did not outlaw their development or stockpiling.) Ben Hubbard, Yonette Joseph, and Christina Caron, New York Times, April 8, 2018.

Does Israel have an obligation to assist Syrian rebel communities threatened by such inhumane attacks? In terms of context, Israel already has a general policy of offering humanitarian medical assistance to Syrians. Recently, a Syrian mother with a high-risk pregnancy faced losing either her life, or the baby's life upon birth based on projected hemorrhaging. She was told she needed to travel from her village to a modern medical center for delivery. She came to Israel through the Israeli humanitarian fence and was admitted to Haifa's Rambam Hospital where Professor Ido Solt's medical team successfully delivered the baby last month.

Following the chemical attacks in Syria, Israel faces a question of a different level of response: should the military intervene in the genocide of Syrian communities with whom Israel does not share peaceful relations?

In response to the chemical warfare used by the Assad government, the Chief Sefardic Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef has declared a moral obligation by Israel to assist the Syrian rebel communities:

Source 11. Chief Sefardic Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef, April 8, 2018 – Israel has a moral obligation to intervene against the Syrian genocide.

There is now cruel widespread murder of Syrian rebel communities, including women and children, by weapons of mass destruction. As Jews who have experienced genocide, as Jews whose Torah is a light to the nations, it is our moral obligation to try and stop this murder. It is an obligation no less important than the moral obligation to having destroyed the nuclear reactor in Syria [in Year 2007].	בסוריה מתרחש רצח עם אכזרי גם של נשים וילדים עם נשק להשמדה המונית. כיהודים שעברו השמדת עם, כיהודים שתורתם היא אור לעמים, החובה המוסרית שלנו היא לנסות למנוע את הטבח. זוהי חובה שאינה פחותה מהחובה המוסרית שהייתה להשמדת הכור בסוריה.
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Rabbi Yosef concluded that, “We have a moral obligation not to keep quiet and to try and stop this massacre.” Rabbi Yosef therefore states that just as Israel took proactive measures to destroy the construction of the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007, Israel needs to intervene today. Does this obligation relate to the mitzvah of “Lo ta’amod?”

Source 12. Ner Le’Elef Training Institute, April 11, 2018 – Without intervention, the situation could dangerously escalate.

Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef has declared something that is awe-inspiring: every Jew needs to be concerned with the genocide in Syria. On the one hand, there is no specific halachic source that obligates Israel to intervene in Syria. The principle of “kill someone first who is coming to kill you” does not apply because the Assad regime is not now firing upon Israel. The mitzvah of “Lo ta’amod” taught in Source 1, “Do not stand aside when your fellow’s blood is being shed” applies to fellow Jews. The mitzvah of “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” does not apply if your life will be endangered. On the other hand, with great depth and foresight, Rabbi Yosef sees a danger to the world. There is the possibility that without intervention, the current situation can escalate, G-d forbid, and lead to the launching of weapons of mass destruction.

A nation such as ours, the Jewish people, who suffered greatly during and after the Holocaust, can especially understand this dangerous situation, and Israel must do what is in her means to stop these atrocities.

Key Themes of Section III

- **Chief Sefardic Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef, declared that Israel has a moral obligation to intervene against the Syrian genocide. Rabbi Yosef stated that just as Israel took proactive measures to destroy the construction of the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007, Israel needs to intervene today.**

Class Summary:

To what extent is a bystander obligated to become proactive to save a stranger's life?

The Torah commands us “not to stand upon your fellow's blood,” meaning that we must not ignore another's danger. This is a far-reaching command. It applies even where the risk to life is small or unclear, even where there is no guarantee that the life at risk will be saved, and even where the life to be saved might be described as of “low quality.”

The obligation applies universally – to anyone who encounters a victim in danger and can help. Although the Torah does not obligate a person to become a doctor in order to save lives, when a life is in danger anyone must do whatever possible in order to save a life.

This mitzvah involves effort, and might entail hiring or arranging for rescue professionals. It might also involve a certain level of discomfort. Jews have traditionally excelled at saving lives, and Judaism considers saving and preserving human life an extremely high priority.

Do I have to endanger myself to save someone else who is in danger?

According to some authorities, this is the subject of a dispute between the two Talmuds. The Talmud Yerushalmi obligates a person to place himself in possible danger to save another who is in certain danger. The Talmud Bavli, however, disagrees with this approach, and many halachic authorities rule that there is no obligation to put oneself into danger for the sake of saving a life (and that therefore one should not do it). That being said, the Aruch Hashulchan cautions the person encountering someone in danger to be honest about whether a rescue mission would endanger him or merely inconvenience him.

Should Israel intervene in the Syrian genocide?

Chief Sefardic Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef concluded that, “We have a moral obligation not to keep quiet and to try and stop this massacre.” Rabbi Yosef stated that just as Israel took proactive measures to destroy the construction of the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007, Israel needs to intervene today.