



רודף (Pursuer)

The Hebrew word, רודף (*rodef*), is literally translated as “pursuer.” In the *Tanakh* (Bible), pursuing can take different forms. The Torah (*Devarim* 16:20) exhorts us, “צִדְקַת צִדְקַת תִּרְדֹּף (Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof. Justice, Justice you shall pursue).” *Mishlei* (Proverbs 13:21) informs us, “חַטָּאִים תִּרְדֹּף רָעָה וְאֶת־צַדִּיקִים יְשַׁלֵּם־טוֹב (Evil pursues sinners. The righteous are rewarded.)”

However, the word is used most prominently in the discussion about one who pursues another person to do harm. Who is a *rodef* and how we react to a *rodef* has been a topic of discussion since people first began discussing the contents of the *Tanakh*.

<i>Shemot</i> 22:1	שמות כב:א
If a thief is found secretly [breaking into someone’s home] and he is struck [so that] he dies, there is no blood [i.e. guilt] for him.	אִם־בַּמְחִתָּרֶת יִמָּצָא הַגֹּנֵב וְהִכָּה וָמֵת אֵין לוֹ דָּמִים

We learn in the Torah that someone is not liable for killing someone who breaks into his home.

- Why would this be the case?
- In what situations do you think this would/would not be applicable today?
- How would you feel or want to react in such situations?
- What are examples you have heard in the news to which this might apply?

<i>Bemidbar Rabbah</i> 21:5	במדבר רבה כא:ה
If someone comes to kill you, get up first to kill him.	בא להרגך השכם להרגו

- How do you interpret the message of this *Midrash*?
- What constitutes a real threat? How do you know someone’s intent?
- How does someone who is plotting an attack far away fit into this teaching?



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<i>Mishnah Senhedrin 8:7</i>	משנה סנהדרין ח:ז
These are the ones that one saves them with their lives (i.e. by killing them): the one who pursues his friend to kill him, and (the one who pursues) a male or an engaged woman. But the one who pursues an animal, the one who desecrates Shabbat, and the one who worships idols; one does not save them with their lives.	וְאֵלוּ הֵן שֶׁמְצִילִין אוֹתָן בְּנַפְשָׁן, הַרֹדֵף אַחַר חֲבֵרוֹ לְהַרְגוֹ, אַחַר הַזָּכוּר וְאַחַר הַנְּעֻרָה הַמְּאֻרְסָה. אֲבָל הַרֹדֵף אַחַר הַבְּהֵמָה, וְהַמְחַלֵּל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, וְהַעוֹבֵד עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, אֵין מְצִילִין אוֹתָן בְּנַפְשָׁן

This Mishnah is a source of discussion among commentators because there is some ambiguity about who is being protected. Some say that the *rodef* is being protected. Others say it is the person being pursued who is being protected.

- Which seems the better interpretation of the text to you? Why?
- How can it be that the *rodef* is the person being protected? What, if any, is the difference between protecting one's body and protecting one's soul?
- How might your understanding of this Mishnah affect how you would apply the concept of *rodef* today?

Mishnah Torah Laws of Murder 1:14	משנה תורה הל' רוצח א:יד
Anyone who can save another person and does not save that person transgresses [the commandment] "Do not stand [idly] on the blood of your fellow. (Vayikra 19:16)"	כָּל הַיְכוּל לְהַצִּיל, וְלֹא הִצִּיל--עוֹבֵר עַל "לֹא תֵעַמְד עַל-דַּם רֵעֶךָ (וַיִּקְרָא" (יט: טז)

In this part of the *Mishnah Torah*, the Rambam posits that it is a *mitzvah* to prevent a person from being killed.

- To what extent should one go to prevent killing?
- When can someone take preemptive action to prevent killing?



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- What is the difference between an imminent personal threat and a threat that comes to a community from far away?
- What do you think the consequences should be, if any, for someone who does not defend others?

HaRav Shalom Cohen	הרב שלום כהן
<p>My heart bleeds over the evil rumor that the hand of a Jew killed the soul of an Arab youth for no fault of his own...One's ears will tingle from hearing about the horrifying act that will awaken the anger of the nations and could bring horrible bloodshed. Anyone whose hand draws innocent blood is subject to <i>din rodef</i> (the law of the pursuer) and it is not possible to describe his punishment from the Heavens...We have an obligation to increase love from within and from without; and, through this, bring about the redemption of the world.</p>	<p>לבי שותת דם על השמועה הרעה שיד ישראל הרגה נפש נער ערבי על לא עוול בכפו... תצלנה אוזניים משמוע על המעשה המחריד המעורר זעם האומות ועשוי להביא לשפיכות דמים נוראית... מי שידי מגואלות בדם נקיים יש עליו דין רודף ואי אפשר לתאר את עונשו מן השמיים. ערב שלושת השבועות עלינו להרבות באהבת חנם מבית ומחוץ ובזכות זה ניוושע ישועת עולמים</p>
<p>Kikar.co.il July 7, 2014 (Retrieved November 24, 2015) http://tinyurl.com/olbarnh</p>	

HaRav Shalom Cohen, a prominent religious figure in Israel, spoke these words after Jewish Israelis killed an Arab teenager in retaliation for the murder of three Jewish Israeli teenagers.

- How does he change your understanding of what a *rodef* is?
- Who is liable for *din rodef*?
- Who would not be liable for *din rodef*?
- How can we know when someone falls into either category?



(Pursuer) רודף

- Rav Cohen has said and written things that some segments of the Jewish population consider to be offensive. How does that knowledge affect your feelings about this statement? How can people with vastly different worldviews come together in difficult times?

I'm gonna catch you. You better run.

I'm gonna catch you. Here I come.

--Laurie Berkner

- How would you feel hearing these words?
- How do your feelings change knowing that these are words from a children's song?
- How do the tone of one's words affect how others understand the words?
- How do we know when a threat is real?

A THOUGHT:

It is possible that those who pursue a *rodef* take on the status of *rodef* themselves.

- What is the danger in pursuing a *rodef*?
- How would you balance the imperative to stop a *rodef* with the danger that becoming a *rodef* presents?
- How can our understanding of the concept of *rodef* help us to deal with difficult situations today?