



**Turning Injustice on Its Head: A Social Action Guide
for Purim**

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Poverty and Hunger	3
Program Ideas for Individuals and Families.....	3
Program Ideas for Groups: Religious School Classes, Youth groups, and Congregations.....	4
Women’s Rights	7
Program Ideas for Individuals and Families.....	8
Program Ideas for Groups: Religious School Classes, Youth groups, and Congregations.....	9
Persecution and Human Rights	11
Program Ideas for Individuals and Families.....	11
Program Ideas for Groups: Religious School Classes, Youth groups, and Congregations.....	13
Acknowledgments	15

Turning Injustice On its Head: A Social Action Guide for Purim

Purim is the holiday of opposites. Just as the story of Esther, which begins with the evil Haman ordering all the Jews be killed and ends with Haman himself put to death, is full of the “upside down,” so too are our celebrations. We change our appearances with costumes, change our drinking habits for the day, and create Purim spiels in which we make fun of our rabbis, our tradition, and ourselves. Nothing is sacred on Purim.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, our topsy-turvy silliness, Purim remains a holiday about social justice. The commandments to eat, drink, and be merry are accompanied by the *mitzvah* of *matanot l’evyonim*, giving *tzedakah* (literally “gifts to the poor”). In the Book of Esther, we read, “the same days on which Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief to joy and from mourning to festival, they were to observe them as days of feasting and merry-making, and as an occasion for sending gifts [*mishloach manot*] and presents to the poor [*matanot l’evyonim*]” (Esther 9:22).

In our giving *matanot l’evyonim* on Purim, and in the larger sense of pursuing social justice, we recognize the need for an inversion in society, a turning upside down of the inequalities we see. By engaging in social action on Purim, we hope to erase the hierarchy of the haves and the have-nots. This guide will focus on three themes related to the holiday of Purim: poverty and hunger, women’s rights, and persecution and human rights. Just as we hope to eliminate the severe economic disparity in our society, we must also eradicate other inequalities, such as those based on gender or ethnicity. In *Megillat Esther*, both Vashti and Esther are in vulnerable positions because of their gender but stood up for themselves in spite of the tremendous risk. We must work towards a day on which women are no longer susceptible to abuse and discrimination. And as Jews, we are uniquely sensitive to the evil of persecution. Although Haman’s plot to kill the Jews rings farcical in our story, the instances of ethnic violence and persecution that exist in the world today are all too real. It is our obligation to demand an end to these atrocities.

Each section of this guide includes an introduction of the theme as it relates to Purim and then two subsections, one for use by individuals and families and the other for youth groups, religious schools, and congregations. Each subsection includes ideas and resources for social action activities that will deepen our celebration of the holiday.

During this time of revelry and fun, of forgetting our usual inhibitions and turning our usual routines on their heads, let us also remember that we have the power to transform the lives of those who are suffering, to turn their days of mourning into days of joy.

For general information on celebrating Purim, visit the Union for Reform Judaism’s holiday website at www.urj.org/holidays/Purim.

Poverty and Hunger

On Purim, giving *matanot l'evyonim* is an integral part of our celebration. We cannot rejoice unless we make it possible for those less fortunate to join in the festivities. Giving *tzedakah* allows the poor to be able to afford their own *s'eudah*, or festive meal. But there is also another aspect to the relationship between *matanot l'evyonim* and rejoicing. Jewish tradition expects that “everybody, even the poorest Israelite who accepts charity, [be] obliged to give at least two gifts to two poor persons” (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* Chapter 142). This law makes it clear that giving gifts on Purim is actually part of the rejoicing; in a sense, by compelling even the recipients of *tzedakah* to give to others, we are saying that there is a joy in giving that we want everyone to be able to experience.

This law requiring everyone to give *matanot l'evyonim* also blurs the lines between the rich and the poor. In our pursuit of economic justice and an end to the great gap between the most and least privileged, we also seek to erase those distinctions. In the Babylonian Talmud, Rava says, “One is obligated to be intoxicated on Purim until one does not know [the difference] between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordechai’” (BT Megillah 7b). Instead of becoming so drunk on Purim that we cannot tell the difference between the hero and the villain of our story, let us make Purim a day on which we envision a world that does not know such vast differences between the wealthy and the needy, but, rather, sustains all of its inhabitants in security and comfort.

Program Ideas for Individuals and Families

Help Poor Jews Celebrate Purim

Contact your local Jewish agencies or congregation to find out if there is a community fund specifically to enable the Jewish poor to celebrate Purim. If there is no fund, create gifts of Purim goodies such as *hamentaschen* and bring them to people who would have difficulty buying the items themselves. Children of any age can decorate the boxes or make greeting cards to include. Gifts might be brought as part of a visit to a senior center or might be left anonymously. Your local Jewish Family Service or rabbi can provide you with a person or place that would love to receive your gift.

Have a Party and Feed the Hungry: The Purim *Se'udah*

Are you hosting or attending a Purim party or *se'udah* (festive meal)? Make a donation to Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger of a percentage of the cost of the food. Ask guests to bring donations of money or canned goods to help fulfill their obligation to give gifts to the poor—and to add meaning to your celebration.

Donate Grocery Store Gift Certificates

Congregation Beth Emeth in Herndon, VA (www.bethemeth.org) asks congregants to donate grocery store gift certificates from any of the local stores to an interfaith food pantry to assist clients with meeting the dietary needs that the canned food drives cannot address. The certificates are also distributed by the Food Pantry staff for fresh foods that the pantry cannot stock.

Change Your Computer's Home Page

Make the Hunger Site your computer's home page. www.thehungersite.com is a free "click to give" site in which staple food is paid for by site sponsors and distributed to those in need by Mercy Corps and America's Second Harvest.

Program Ideas for Groups: Religious School Classes, Youth Groups, and Congregations

Read the *Megillah* and Fight Hunger

- Collect *matanot l'evyonim* at your *megillah* reading.
- **Temple Beth Ami in Rockville, MD** (www.bethami.org) and **Sinai Temple in Springfield, MA** (www.sinai-temple.org) ask their congregants to bring boxes of pasta to the *megillah* reading instead of traditional graggers, which are then donated to a local food pantry.

Let the Needy Benefit from Your Purim Carnival

- Invite underprivileged children to join in the fun at your Purim carnival.
- Donate the proceeds from the carnival to a local organization that assists families in need.
- The post-B'nai Mitzvah class at **Temple Sholom in Scotch Plains, NJ** (www.sholomnj.org) creates flyers to teach the congregation about the *mitzvot* of *mishloach manot* and *matanot l'evyonim*. The class also runs a booth at the Purim Carnival so that others can decorate handouts explaining the holiday of Purim and bags of treats to be given to the needy.

Organize a "Pennies for Purim" Fundraiser

(Adapted from Hillel's "Pennies for Purim" Program: www.hillel.org)

Pennies for Purim is an innovative program that can get the entire community involved in the special Purim mitzvah of *matanot l'evyonim*. The basic idea is to raise funds by covering an area of the synagogue—a classroom, social hall, or other large space—in pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters, which will be donated to an organization that fights hunger or poverty. In the weeks leading up to Purim, spread the news that you are collecting coins for this incredible drive. Hold your big event on Purim, and have everyone involved bring their coins and spread them out on the space. Provide *hamantaschen* for everyone!

Create a "Cinderella's Project" for Young Women in Need

Sinai Temple in Springfield, MA (www.sinai-temple.org) organizes a drive for special occasion dresses to be donated to inner-city teens in time for prom season. The synagogue collects the dresses and then donates them to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center in Springfield, MA, which manages their distribution. Create your own "Esther's Project" or "Vashti's Project" in celebration of Purim.

Hold a Masquerade Marathon

(Adapted from Hillel's "Masquerade Marathon" Program: www.hillel.org)

Host a 24-hour masquerade dance marathon to raise money for a homeless shelter. Shifts can be made up of the different religious school classes, youth groups, and temple committees. Ask community organizations to sponsor individuals or groups.

Include a Purim "Reverse Lottery" for Tzedakah

The word "Purim" means "lots," referring to the lots Haman drew to decide on which day the Jews would be destroyed. On this holiday of reversals, let us draw lots for good rather than evil. Hold a "reverse lottery" in which each prize is the privilege to make a charitable donation. The prizes can range from \$2.00 to \$200.00.

Teach about Poverty with "Pack it up for Purim"

Boston University's Hillel designed a program to have students fulfill the mitzvah of *matanot l'evyonim*, giving gifts to the poor, on Purim, and to have them learn about hunger in Massachusetts. Students filled gift bags with a list of specific items by moving around the room and collecting items from different stations. Each station included facts about hunger (what causes it, who is affected by it, why it is a problem, etc.) so that students would read the information as they made their way around the room. When they finished packing the bag, they were encouraged to make cards and decorations for the bags at the arts and crafts table and to read about the organization to which the bags would be donated before getting a second bag to pack.

Create Eco-Friendly Mishloach Manot and Raise Money for the Hungry Minyan Dorshei Derekh of the Germantown Jewish Centre in Philadelphia, PA

(www.germantownjewishcentre.org), a member of both the Conservative and Reconstructionist Movements, has created an alternative form of *mishloach manot* (packages of sweet foods and gifts traditionally given to neighbors and friends) for Purim. Members are invited to donate money, instead of handing out home baked and/or purchased goodies, which were always wrapped in plastic and given in disposable containers. Instead each household receives a basket (actually a reused clementine box!) full of goodies, and the remainder goes to food-related causes. Last year they included an energy efficient compact fluorescent (CFL) bulb in each *shaloch manot* package as well, and still had over \$1200 to donate to Mazon, Philabundance, and International Hunger programs. People who love to bake get together and contribute their goodies, which are included in the baskets, increasing the amount that can be given to *tzedakah*. They also include interesting educational materials and environmental information.

Take Your Religious School Class on a Social Action Field Trip

The eighth- and ninth-graders at **Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester** (www.bethelnw.org) spend the weekend before Purim at Youth Service Opportunity Project (www.ysop.org), a non-profit organization committed to making young people a part of the solution to societal problems by helping them learn what a difference they can make in the lives of others. Workcamps vary in length from single day to weeklong. Participants touch the lives of more than 225,000 hungry and homeless people each year

through their work in shelters, soup kitchens, schools, food and clothing banks and other direct-service institutions in New York City and Washington, DC.

Raise Money at “Esther’s Boutique”

On the night of Purim, **Sinai Temple in Springfield, MA** (www.sinai-temple.org) holds “Esther’s Boutique.” They set up a table in the foyer of the synagogue with different baby items (clothes, toys, etc), which congregants can “buy.” The articles are then donated to a local family shelter.

“Pick Haman's Pockets”

Temple Israel of Tulsa, OK (www.templetulsa.com) created this program to educate congregants about the mitzvah of *matanot l'evyonim* as well as benefit the clients of the Parent-Child Center of Tulsa. Based on the principle of the "angel tree" we see in malls at Christmas time, the Parent-Child Center (PCC) staff gave the congregation (first) names of children in need and wishes/needs for each. The wishes were placed in hamentaschen-shaped pockets on a six-foot-tall wooden Haman who was placed in the foyer of the synagogue for several weeks before Purim. Pockets all over his person were color-coded so that folks could pick gift requests that were financially appropriate for them. Gifts were collected in a box alongside Haman and were delivered to the PCC just after Purim. Since many people associate Chanukah with gift giving, the aim of this program was to shed light on our traditional gift-giving holiday and benefit a worthwhile cause.

Women's Rights

In the Book of Esther, two women find themselves in vulnerable positions because of their gender. Vashti pays a high price for her dignity when she is banished from the palace for refusing to dance at the king's drinking party. Esther, who is chosen as Vashti's successor in a beauty pageant, fears for her very life in approaching the king without his express request to see her. Women are expendable, merely objects to entertain or to be admired, and can be disposed of at will. The men of the story worry what might happen if women are given too much agency. Memuchan, one of Ahasuerus's officers, warns the king of the dire consequences of Vashti's rebellion:

Queen Vashti has committed an offense not only against Your Majesty but also against all the officials and against all the peoples in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the queen's behavior will make all wives despise their husbands, as they reflect that King Ahasuerus himself ordered Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.... If it please Your Majesty, let a royal edict be issued by you, and let it be written into the laws of Persia and Media...that Vashti shall never enter the presence of King Ahasuerus.... Then will the judgment executed by Your Majesty resound throughout your realm, vast though it is; and all wives will treat their husbands with respect, high and low alike (Esther 1:16-20).

Memuchan's anxiety about what would happen if women did not have the proper respect for their husbands seems humorous to us now, but in fact, our world is not so different from the world of Shushan. Discrimination and violence against women are global problems. Women shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden of poverty and the effects of war. Like Vashti and Esther, women in developing countries and, in some ways even our own, have limited control over their bodies or their livelihoods.

The Talmud says that Memuchan, who urged King Ahasuerus to exile Vashti, is actually Haman, who urged the king to destroy the Jews (BT Megillah 12b). Arthur Waskow argues that this *midrash* teaches us powerful lessons about the nature of oppression. He asks,

Do we learn from the *Megillah* that those who will not treat Jews as human will also not treat women as human? That Haman and Mehuman [sic] are the same oppressor because they do the same oppression? ... And that just as the oppression of women and of the Jewish people is intertwined, so their victories are intertwined? That the victory, the freedom of the Jewish people will only come with the victory, the freedom, of womankind?¹

As we celebrate our victory over oppression, may we also remember those, including millions of women, who are not yet free.

¹ Arthur Waskow, *Seasons of Our Joy*, Summit Books, New York, 1982, page 126.

Program Ideas for Individuals and Families

Give to the Jewish Fund for Justice's Purim Fund

The Jewish Fund for Justice established the Purim Fund for Women in Poverty in 1988 to help women successfully overcome barriers to becoming economically self-sufficient. Organizations supported by the Purim Fund give low-income women the strength, skills and means to take leadership in their communities and organize for livable wage jobs, decent affordable childcare, and economic development opportunities. In honor of Queen Esther's courageous efforts to save the Jewish people, the Purim Fund also honors the struggles faced by our immigrant mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers when they first landed on these shores--often working in oppressive conditions while struggling to hold their families together. For more information, visit www.jfjustice.org.

Donate your Old Cell Phone to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The NCADP collects deactivated cell phones (which still allow for 911 calls) to distribute to victims of domestic violence so that they can call for emergency help. Visit their website for more information at www.ncadv.org/takeaction/DonateaPhone_129.html.

Distribute Information about Help for Victims of Domestic Violence

Place informational material about a local shelter for victims of spousal abuse in the women's rooms at your synagogue, place of employment, hair salon, and clothing stores—anywhere you can think of.

Advocate for Women's Reproductive Rights

- *Speak Out on Federal Advocacy Issues*- Take action by sending a letter to elected officials. Whether the subject is U.S. Supreme Court nominations or bills to cut critical family planning funding you can stay informed and speak out on choice issues of the day. Check out the RAC's issue page on reproductive rights for more information at rac.org/advocacy/issues/issuerepts.
- *Support Pro-Choice Organizations*- Check out the following organizations that are working to ensure women's reproductive rights:
 - Planned Parenthood (www.plannedparenthood.org)
 - National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (www.naral.org)
 - Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (www.rcrc.org)
 - National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association (www.nfprha.org)

Donate to American Jewish World Service's Women's Empowerment Projects

Women living in the developing world shoulder the heaviest burdens of poverty as a result of gender discrimination and social inequality. Yet despite these challenges, women frequently serve as the catalysts for creating positive social change. Through grant making and the Women's Empowerment Fund, AJWS supports programs designed to enable women to become agents of change, empowering them to transform their own lives and create lasting and meaningful change for themselves, their families and their

communities. Visit www.ajws.org and click on “Women’s Empowerment” for information on AJWS’s current projects.

Join Amnesty International’s Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women

By joining AI’s Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women, you will receive information about current women’s rights issues around the globe and about local efforts to combat discrimination and violence. You can also donate to the campaign to ensure its success. Visit www.amnesty.org/actforwomen for more information on how to join.

Urge African Governments to Ratify the Women’s Rights Protocol

African women made history in 2003 through the adoption of a protocol that specifically protects women’s human rights and breaks new ground in international law. But before the protocol has the force of law, fifteen African governments must ratify it. As of early March 2005, ten countries had ratified the Protocol (Comoros, Djibouti, Libya, Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, and Senegal). African women’s rights organizations are leading an innovative and energetic campaign to get more countries to ratify the protocol. Show your solidarity with them by writing to African heads of state to urge them to ratify the protocol. Visit Human Rights Watch’s website for more information at www.humanrightswatch.org/women/africaprotocol.

Program Ideas for Groups: Religious School Classes, Youth Groups, and Congregations

Organize a Mock Beauty Pageant

(Adapted from loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org/pageant.html)

In the *megillah*, the king is advised to find a replacement for Queen Vashti by holding a beauty pageant in which all the young women of the kingdom would come and be dressed up and adorned. Esther “won his grace and favor more than all the virgins” (2:17), so she was crowned queen. Traditional beauty pageants value women solely by how well they fit into conventional beauty standards. In the spirit of Purim, subvert this institution by staging a mock beauty pageant. Rather than award women for the way they look, give out “Esther prizes” to women who make a difference in the world.

Clean Out Your Closets to Benefit Women in Need

The Wardrobe: A Collection of Women’s Professional Clothing is a project of the New Haven County Bar Foundation in collaboration with **Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel** (www.beki.org), a Conservative synagogue, and the Community Action Agency of New Haven. The Wardrobe provides women’s professional clothing without charge to participants in Community Action Agency of New Haven’s job training programs. This training assists women on welfare prepare to enter or re-enter the workplace. Participants in the programs need appropriate clothing to interview for jobs and to wear in an office setting.

Hold a Workshop at Your Synagogue on Violence Against Women

(Adapted by Hillel from a program at the University of Miami)

Beginning with a negative interaction between Queen Vashti and King Ahasuerus, the story of Purim provides an opportunity to look more closely at relationship abuse and ways to combat it emotionally and physically. Invite a speaker, have an interactive discussion, or hold a mini self-defense class at your synagogue. Provide information for the women to take home about relationship abuse. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (www.ncadv.org) and the Faith Trust Institute (www.faithtrustinstitute.org), an organization that offers a wide range of services and resources to provide communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the religious and cultural issues related to domestic and sexual abuse, may be helpful in planning your program.

Persecution and Human Rights

“Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, ‘There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; and it is not in Your Majesty’s interest to tolerate them. If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury.’ ... And the king said, ‘The money and the people are yours to do with as you see fit’” (Esther 3:8-11).

As a people painfully familiar with the horrors of genocide, we know all too well the persecution that comes from being a people “scattered and dispersed,” with laws “different from those of any other people.” Today, thousands of people around the world are persecuted because of differences in race, religion, gender, or political affiliation. The genocide in Darfur is only the most recent such crisis to find the global spotlight.

Yet the story of Purim is also a lesson in our own responsibility. At the end of the *megillah*, we read that on the thirteenth of Adar, the day before Purim, the Jews kill 75,000 of their enemies. While Purim is a day on which we celebrate our victory over Haman’s plot to destroy us, we must remember the violent way in which we triumphed. None of us are blameless. In honor of Purim, let us take the opportunity to learn about persecution and human rights violations and work towards peaceful solutions to these conflicts.

Program Ideas for Individuals and Families

Educate Yourself

The first step in responding to a humanitarian crisis is to become educated. The following organizations can help you learn more about persecution and other human rights issues in countries around the world:

- **American Jewish World Service** (www.ajws.org)- AJWS is an independent not-for-profit organization founded in 1985 to help alleviate poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the world regardless of race, religion or nationality. It breathes life into Judaism's imperative to pursue justice and helps American Jews act upon a deeply felt obligation to improve the chances for survival, economic independence and human dignity for all people. AJWS' grant making fulfills both Jewish and humanitarian responsibilities for people around the globe.
- **Amnesty International** (www.amnesty.org)- Amnesty International (AI) is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights. AI’s vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards. In pursuit of this vision, AI’s mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of human rights.

- **Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org)**- Human Rights Watch is the largest human rights organization based in the United States. Human Rights Watch researchers conduct fact-finding investigations into human rights abuses in all regions of the world. Human Rights Watch then publishes those findings in dozens of books and reports every year, generating extensive coverage in local and international media.
- **Religious Action Center (www.rac.org)**- The RAC, the Reform Movement's political voice in Washington, DC, regularly highlights current global issues on its website. Check out its "Issues" page for up-to-date information on a variety of issues, including human rights.

Raise Awareness About Darfur

Jewish activism in reaction to the atrocities in Darfur serves as a useful model for responding to humanitarian crises:

- Wear a green wristband or ribbon (available at www.savedarfur.org). Hand them out with a flyer explaining why it's important to draw attention to the situation in Darfur. Ask a teacher, an administrator, a public official or a local celebrity to wear a green wristband or ribbon.
- Host a potluck dinner, listen to an audio essay or watch a video presentation about Darfur, organize a teach-in or a presentation, or invite an expert to speak about Darfur. Prepare information sheets, hand out green wristbands or ribbons and provide sample letters for participants to send to our national leaders.

Contact Legislators

Send emails, letters, faxes and make phone calls to government leaders to take action in response to humanitarian crises. The websites listed above have a wealth of information for talking points to use in conversations and letters to legislators.

Collect Signatures

Start a petition calling for a strong response to instances of persecution. Remember that petitions should include the names and addresses of the signatories and the petition statement should be printed on the top of each page. Address the petition to the President and send copies of the petition to your local Senators and Representatives.

Pledge to Donate Money to Human Rights Organizations

During your celebration of Purim, pledge a certain amount of money for every time Haman's name is mentioned during the *megillah* reading. AJWS, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International are all worthy organizations fighting to end human rights violations and assure that all people can live lives of dignity. Check out their websites for more information about specific projects you can contribute to or other grassroots programs these organizations support.

Program Ideas for Groups: Religious School Classes, Youth Groups, and Congregations

During the crisis in Darfur, synagogues and Jewish communities across the country have reacted with a variety of campaigns, vigils, demonstrations, and other events to raise a Jewish voice against the atrocities, calling for the imperative “Never Again” to be the watchword of our country’s response to the genocide being perpetrated in the Sudan. What follows are some suggestions of responses to persecution that would be appropriate to hold in conjunction with celebrations of Purim.

Organize a Candle-Lighting Ceremony or Candlelight Vigil

On August 25, 2004, congregations around the country participated in a Day of Conscience in recognition of the situation in the Sudan. Again in July 2005, the US observed the Days of Reflection for victims of the crisis in Darfur. Interfaith services were held, with Jews, Muslims and Christians praying together for an end to the bloodshed in Darfur. These events were used to alert the country to the atrocities occurring in Darfur, in the hopes of motivating people to action. Reform congregations played a significant role in these events. **Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington, DC** (www.whctemple.org) held a multi-faith service that included Jews, Christian, Roman Catholic, Hindu-Jain, Sikh, Baha’i, Mormon, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian faiths. In **Durham, NC, Judea Reform Congregation** (www.judeareform.org) held an interfaith Service of Conscience for the genocide victims of Darfur, calling for an end to the bloodshed in Darfur. **Temple Israel, of Omaha, NE** (ne001.uri.net) was joined by representatives from the Anti-Defamation League, the Mayor’s Office, Reform and Conservative Temples, The Islamic Center of Omaha, the Catholic Archdiocese, the Hindu Temple and two Southern (Christian) Sudanese congregations to hold a joint press conference at the city/county chamber’s office addressing the crisis in the Sudan.

According to the Book of Esther, the thirteenth of Adar, the day before Purim, is the day on which the Jews battled their enemies, killing 75,000 people. While we celebrate our triumph over those who would destroy us, we must not ignore the violence we ourselves employed. By holding a candlelight vigil on the thirteenth of Adar, we recognize our own culpability and remember those who have been lost to persecution and ethnic violence.

Call for a *Ta’anit Esther*- Fast for Humanitarian Crises

The day before Purim is traditionally *Ta’anit Esther*, the Fast of Esther, which commemorates the three-day fast that Esther asks the Jews to hold before she goes to plead before the king. Fasting for a day is not only a very personal way to tap into your compassion for the suffering of others, but also a very powerful way to act in solidarity with the people being persecuted. Hold a community-wide fast the day before Purim in solidarity with those who are suffering and donate the funds that would have been spent on meals. The money can be donated to organizations like the Save Darfur Coalition (www.savedarfur.org) or any of the humanitarian organizations doing relief work around the world.

Host a “Dolls for Darfur” Gathering

Julie Silverman, a congregant at **Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, TX** has founded “Dolls for Darfur,” a grassroots social justice effort designed to urge members of Congress and President George Bush to approve legislation that would help bring an end to genocide in Darfur, Sudan. Participants can make Dolls for Darfur pins to raise awareness and funds for relief and can fill out postcards to send to legislators, urging them to support current legislation responding to the crisis. Visit www.dollsfordarfur.org for more information.

Hold a Screening of “Hotel Rwanda” at Your Synagogue

During the month before Purim, invite the congregation and the public to a viewing of the film “Hotel Rwanda” and have a discussion afterwards.

Invite Experts to Speak About Genocide

The University of Virginia Hillel held a weeklong initiative to raise awareness about genocide, specifically in the Darfur region of Sudan. Three prominent professors at the university led a discussion on genocide in the past century. The lecture series included but was not limited to the Holocaust, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the current situation in Sudan. Another professor spoke about United States politics and genocide and a graduate of the university discussed his personal experiences in Darfur. For more information about this weeklong program, visit Hillel’s website at www.hillel.org and search the Program Bank for “Day of Conscience.”

Join or Form a Coalition

Temple Isaiah in Lafayette, CA launched the Dear Sudan, Love Contra Costa County campaign for education, advocacy, and fundraising for Darfur. As part of the campaign, which included letter-writing, petitions, and a candlelight vigil, Temple Isaiah joined the San Francisco Bay Area Darfur Coalition (www.darfursf.org), an alliance of 40 member organizations and numerous individual members, including some of the San Francisco Bay Area’s most prominent community leaders, activists, and academic experts. Their website is a resource center where activists can obtain and provide information, publicize events, gather news, and share ideas and resources related to the situation in Darfur. Temple Israel also signed the coalition’s Unity Statement, calling for the United States to advocate for UN involvement in the region to bring an end to the genocide.

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