

**Purim: A Study Guide on Human Rights
Fighting Genocide**
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Purim is traditionally a time in which Jews partake in frivolity and excessive eating and drinking. We celebrate the triumph of Mordecai and the Jews over Haman and his attempted genocide. However, underneath the light-hearted nature of the holiday are more serious themes. Purim tells the story of when the Jews in the Diaspora were nearly annihilated by a murderous man for no reason other than their ethnicity. This kind of persecution has followed the Jews throughout their history, most notably in Germany under the Nazis. As Jews, our community's suffering has taught us of the need to fight against genocide in all of its forms.

We encourage you to use these Jewish texts and study questions to consider our Jewish values that speak to the issue of human rights.

Text 1: A Certain People

<p>And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it profiteth not the king to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those that have the charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.' And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. - Esther 3:8-10</p>	<p>אָתָּה-עִם יִשְׁנֹו--אֲחַשְׁרוּשׁ לְמֶלֶךְ, הֵמֶן וַיֹּאמֶר מִלְכוּתָךְ מְדִינֹת בְּכֹל, הָעַמִּים בֵּין דּוֹמֶפֶךְ מִפְּזֹר אֵינֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ דְּתִי-וְאֵת, עַם-מִכָּל שְׁנוֹת וְדַתֵּיהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ-עַל-אֵם. לְהַנִּיחֵם, שׁוּה-אִין וְלְמֶלֶךְ, עֹשִׂים כְּסֹף-כֶּפֶר אֲלֵפִים וְעֶשְׂרֵת; לְאַבְדֵם יִפְתָּב, טוֹב גְּנוּזִי-אֵל, לְהַבִּיא, הַמְלָאכָה עֹשִׂי יַיֵד-עַל אֲשֶׁקוּל וַיִּתְּנָה; נִדּוּ מֵעַל, טַבְעֵתוֹ-אֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיָּסֶר. הַמֶּלֶךְ הַיְהוּדִים צִרַר--הָאֲגָגִי הַמְדַתָּא-בֶן לְהֵמֶן</p>
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1. How was Haman able to convince the king that the Jews had to be annihilated? How does he disguise his motives?
2. How has this kind of language been used by other dictators throughout history to justify discrimination and persecution? Where do we see this kind of language contemporarily?

Text 2: The King's Ring

When Haman asks the King permission to destroy the Jews, the King hands over his signet ring.

R. Abba b. Kahana said: This removal of the ring was more efficacious than forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses who prophesied to Israel. -Talmud *Megillot* 14b

1. Why does the Talmud teach us that the removal of the signet ring accomplished more than any of the prophets? What did this rather insignificant act accomplish?
2. In what way does passivity, carelessness or ignorance contribute to mass catastrophes or genocide? In what ways can we combat this?

Text 3: Jewish Power

After Haman's plot is foiled, the Jews are granted the ability to defend themselves against those who would kill them.

The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them was fallen upon all the peoples...And the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of them that hated them seventy and five thousand--but on the spoil they laid not their hand. -Esther 9:2, 16

הַמֶּלֶךְ מְדִינֹת-בְּכֹל, בְּעָרֵיהֶם הַיְהוּדִים נִקְהָלוּ
וְאִישׁ; רָעַתָּם בַּמִּבְקָשִׁי, יָד לְשַׁלַּח, אֲחֻשׁוֹרוּשׁ
כָּל-עַל פְּתָדָם נָפַל-כִּי, לִפְנֵיהֶם עָמַד-לֹא
הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּמִדְיָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר הַיְהוּדִים וְשָׂאֵר...הָעַמִּים
וְהָרוּג, מֵאֵיבֵיהֶם וְנוֹחַ, נִפְשָׁם-עַל וְעָמַד קָהְלוּ
לֹא--וּבְבִזָּה; אֶלֶף וְשִׁבְעִים חֲמִשָּׁה, בְּשָׂאֵיהֶם
יָדָם-אֵת, שָׁלְחוּ

1. How does this text at the end of the book of Esther transform the story of Purim for you? How do you feel about this violence that the Jews commit?
2. Do you think that so much violence can be justified by the aegis of “defending themselves”? Why or why not?
3. Do we see this kind of dynamic play out in our world? How? How might we try to find better ways of defending ourselves against persecution?