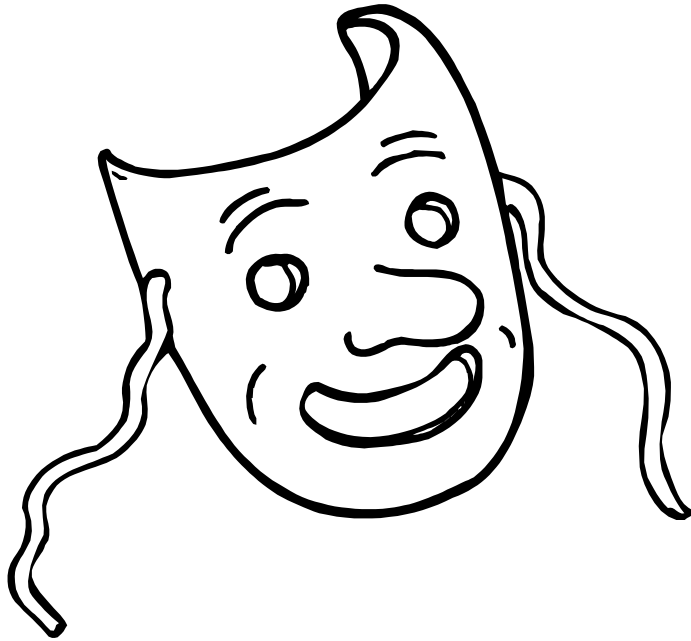


PURIM

Purim takes place on the 14th of Adar; in some Israeli cities that had walls in ancient times, the holiday occurs on the 15th of Adar. We celebrate the festival of Purim by listening to a story set in the Persian Empire over two thousand years ago. Munching on tasty three-cornered hamentashen, we listen as the Megilla (“scroll”) of Esther unravels a complicated tale of political schemes, power struggles, and beauty. The Megillah describes a time when a villain named Haman nearly succeeded in his plan to destroy the Jews of Persia; that he failed is cause for feasts and celebration. Toward the end of the Megilla, four mitzvot are listed as the proper ways to celebrate the holiday. First, we are supposed to hear the story of Esther; this tale reveals the complex power relationships between men and women. Secondly, we are commanded to have a festive meal with an abundance of wine; this leads to a debate in Jewish tradition about the boundaries of drinking. Thirdly, there is the mitzvah of *mishloach manot*, literally “sending portions.” We wrap up hamentashen, raisins, fruit, and other goodies into a basket and deliver them to our family and friends. The final obligation is to deliver *matanot la’evyonim*, “gifts to the poor.” Together, these four mitzvot make Purim time to listen not only to the Megillah, but also to the voices of those in need in our community.



What is my issue?

Hunger

Program: Pennies for Purim

Adapted from America's Second Harvest (www.secondharvest.org)

Pennies for Purim is an innovative program that can get the entire campus community involved in the special Purim mitzvah of *matanot la'evyonim*. The basic idea is to raise funds by covering an area of campus – whether it is the floor of the student union, the gymnasium, or a classroom – in pennies, nickles, dimes, and quarters. In the weeks leading up to Purim spread the news that you are collecting coins for this incredible drive. Choose a local organization where the money will go; one way to tap into the theme of helping the poor on Purim is to choose a nonprofit that combats the issue of hunger. Hold your big event on Purim, and have all of the organizations involved bring their coins and spread them out on the space. Provide hamentashen for everyone! End your successful program by inviting all of the participants to a large costume party the next night, and encourage everyone to come and bring canned goods.

Who can be my community partners?

- Local nonprofits dealing with the issue of hunger
- Local elementary schools
- Campus student groups
- Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerican.org)
- Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger (www.mazon.org)
- National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness (www.nscanh.org)

What advocacy/awareness can I add to the program?

- In the publicity for the event (tabling or other mechanisms) create awareness about hunger in your campus community, through statistics on table tents, flyers, or ads in your campus newspaper. To find hunger statistics in the United States, access www.frac.org.
- On the day of the event, have material about hunger to distribute, petitions to sign about an issue in your community, or a poster about ways to get involved in your community. To find current legislation in the United States, access www.frac.org.

What meaningful service components can I include?

- Go to the local elementary schools and explain your project. Conduct a contest for the class that brings in the most jars of coins. Offer a pizza party as a reward; you can ask a local pizza parlor to donate the pizzas! Remember to get your community at large involved!
- At your campus Megillah reading/Purim party, have students bring canned goods for the local shelters. Following Purim, have students help distribute the cans.

How can I incorporate Jewish content?

- Take a moment at the beginning of the program to explain the concept of *matanot la'evyonim*, gifts to the poor. Some consider this to be the most important mitzvah of Purim, since it helps everyone to enjoy the celebration of Purim.

What is my issue?

Relationship abuse

Program: Defend Yourself

Adapted from 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. This program CAN integrate a speaker/interactive discussion with a mini self-defense class and a debriefing. This program is important for college women because they or their friends might encounter relationship abuse and might not know what to do, or even what it is. With the right community partners, this program can equip participants with the tools to do something if an abusive situation arises.

Who can be my community partners?

- University health center
- Sororities
- Women's groups on campus
- Local police
- Jewish Women's International (www.jwi.org)
- National Council of Jewish Women (www.ncjw.org)
- Hadassah (www.hadassah.org)

What advocacy/awareness can I add to the program?

- Have information available as the women leave the program about relationship abuse; this may include: *physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or economic* abuse and typically includes *threats, intimidation, intense criticism, forced isolation, and/or physical violence*. Access the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's homepage at www.ncadv.org.
- Find out about current domestic violence laws in your state as well as on the national level – see how you can help (www.ncadv.org)

What meaningful service components can I include?

- At the program have local nonprofit organizations that deal with women's issues on hand to answer questions about what their organization is doing and how they can help get involved.
- Have a cell phone drive for old cell phones that can be used for victims of domestic violence. Many communities collect cell phones for women who have suffered domestic violence and program the phones to directly contact local police.

How can I incorporate Jewish content?

- Frame the opening discussion with a brief retelling of the incident between Queen Vashti and King Ahasuerus. Discuss what the issue is and how the relationship progresses.
 - *The setting:* After a period of 180 days, wherein he has “displayed the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty” (Esther 1:4), King Ahasuerus caps off his celebration with a festive seven-day banquet in the city of Shushan.
 - *The incident:* The King decides that his wife should be included in the display of riches. He orders his eunuchs “to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing a royal diadem, to display her beauty to the peoples and the officials; for she was a beautiful woman. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command conveyed by the eunuchs. The king was greatly incensed, and his fury burned within him” (Esther 1:11-12).
 - *The aftermath:* Ahasuerus consults with his sages, who declare that Vashti’s defiance of the king’s orders has offended all of the king’s subjects. The king issues a royal edict that Vashti will never again be able to enter his presence, and he will commence a search for a new queen. The sages hope that this treatment will ensure that “all wives will treat their husbands with respect, high and low alike” (Esther 1:20).

What is my issue?

Awareness of mercury's harmful impact on the environment

Program: Mercury Thermometer Roundup!

Adapted from Jews United for Justice (www.jufj.org)

One of Purim's themes is the idea of being hidden. The Festival is traditionally called the holiday of hidden miracles. There is a Talmudic concept connecting Esther's name with the Hebrew words *hester*, or 'hidden.' Within the Purim story, Mordecai asks Esther to hide her Jewish identity; the Book of Esther relates, "Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it" (2:10) Build a Purim program around the idea of being hidden, and choose a hidden danger on which to focus your program. Mercury is an example of a harmful substance that often goes unnoticed, but which may be lurking in household products such as thermometers. What can college students do about the issue of mercury and its harmful impact on the environment? How can you educate your campus community and encourage the proper disposal of these materials? There are a variety of different programs that you can do from educational forums for local families to drives for the collection of mercury thermometers.

Mercury Facts:

Why does using a non-mercury thermometer protect the environment and promote health in your own home and our community?

*There are only 1.5 grams—less than one-tenth of an ounce—of mercury in one little thermometer. Doesn't seem like such a big deal, right? But even **as little as one gram is enough to affect a whole 20-acre lake** to such a degree that warnings are required to limit consumption of the fish in it. Now consider that an estimated **17 tons of mercury** are discarded every year in thermometers.*

Mercury thermometers are easily broken, and the liquid mercury that spills out upon breakage is hard to control. It soaks into rugs and slithers into cracks in the floor, making it difficult to find and unsafe to clean up. In particular, **mercury forms a vapor that can cause a variety of serious, permanent health effects**, particularly in children.

Even if a broken thermometer reaches the trash without contaminating the home, **municipal trash brings the mercury into the larger environment**. From the landfill, it can leach into groundwater and surface water—such as rivers and lakes—as a liquid; from either the landfill or from trash incinerators, it can escape into the atmosphere as a vapor. From the atmosphere, mercury falls with rain and snow and finds its way into surface water. Once in the water, mercury is converted into a highly toxic form that is hard to break down but that is easily absorbed by plants and animals.

It is very difficult to control the release of mercury into the environment once it is in the waste stream. **The best way to keep our homes and environment safe from mercury are to limit the use of mercury-containing products* such as thermometers, and to make sure they are disposed responsibly.**

Now you know the dangers of items with mercury...do something about it! Hold a drive to collect mercury based products, specifically thermometers. Also, hold educational seminars for parents to warn them of the dangers.

Who can be my community partners?

- Health Care Without Harm: <http://www.noharm.org/index.cfm>
- Local hospitals, clinics, health care facilities
- Health studies department
- Community organizations that outreach to families
- Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)

What advocacy/awareness can I add to the program?

- By educating your community you are increasing awareness of the issue.
- Check local and national legislation about the general issue of mercury at Health Care Without Harm's Web site: <http://www.noharm.org/index.cfm>

What meaningful service components can I include?

- Organize a drive to collect the mercury thermometers. Partner with a local pharmacy to offer an exchange program; when individuals turn in mercury thermometers, they would then receive a mercury-free thermometer at cost or for free. Make sure to contact the appropriate organization for proper disposal.
- Create special forums in schools that parents can attend about the dangers of mercury and encourage them to make their homes mercury-free.

How can I incorporate Jewish content?

- Examine the ethical angle of this issue using these provocative ideas from Jewish sources, care of the Jews United for Justice Web site (www.jufj.org). Create small slips of paper to leave on tables during the program, or incorporate these texts into eye-catching posters for your Hillel building or around campus. Have a conversation about the rights and wrongs of protecting each other from hidden harm.
 - ***The mitzvah of pikuach nefesh, saving a life, takes precedence over most any other commandment.*** The field of health care is inherently engaged in this *mitzvah*—yet when it is not carried out "without harm," it may fall short in this regard. This is particularly true when safer alternatives exist, as they do for mercury thermometers.

- ***Judaism teaches that “[humans and the earth] are bound up with one another for better and for worse, but in such a way that it is man who determines the fate of the earth by his conduct, the fate which in turn becomes his own.”*** This is evident in the very language of Torah: a human (*adam*) and our lifeblood (*dam*) is of the earth (*adamah*).
- ***Judaism also teaches that our responsibilities extend to other creatures and all of nature as well.*** “The Lord God took Adam and put him into the garden of Eden to work [or to tend, *l’avdah*, root is *avodah*, work] and to keep [or to guard, *l’shamrah*, root is *shomer*] it (Genesis 2:15).”
- ***According to Maimonides:*** “It should not be believed that all beings exist for the sake of humanity’s existence . . . rather, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes.”
- ***Further, we are not permitted to force someone else to bear the dangerous consequences of our actions:*** Rabbi Yitzchak bar Sheshet, a 14th century great halachic authority, ruled that “Whatever the cost, a person is not permitted to save himself from injury by causing injury to his neighbor.”²
- ***The impact of something as seemingly small as our mercury thermometer goes against the notion of dignity enshrined in the basic teaching that we are all created b’tzelem Elohim, in the Divine image (Genesis 1:27).*** Medical waste incinerators, which concentrate toxins such as mercury, tend to be placed in low-income and minority neighborhoods.

¹Buber [*On Zionism*, 11-12]

²Aryeh Carmell, [*Challenge: Torah Views on Science and its Problems*, p. 503]
