RETHINKING Purim
WOMEN, RELATIONSHIPS & JEWISH TEXTS
Purim 5772, March 2012

Dear Friend,

JWI is delighted to release the first of a series of guides, Women, Relationships and Jewish Texts, designed to spark new conversations about iconic relationships by taking a fresh look at old texts. The focus of this guide, Rethinking Purim, lends itself to lively discussion in and around the holiday. Using the text of the megillah, midrash, and modern commentary, the guide is designed to encourage conversations about relationships. Each section of the guide discusses a different quality common to healthy relationships: a voice of one’s own, the conscious use of self, and striving for parity.

A number of people were instrumental in developing Rethinking Purim: Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum conceived of the project and is the lead author of this guide. We are also grateful to Rabbis Amy Bolton and Nina Beth Cardin and Cantor Deborah Katchko-Gray for their thoughtful participation in the project. All are members of JWI’s Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community, a group of prominent clergy committed to promoting Jewish responses that end violence against women. Please visit www.jwi.org/clergy to learn more about the important work of the Task Force.

We are thrilled at the level of interest in the guide expressed by the Jewish community. Our work is stronger through our partnerships and collaborations and we thank the many organizations helping to disseminate this guide to their networks. We anticipate that the guides will be used by diverse people in a variety of settings - whether in a synagogue, college or at home, in a preexisting study group, hevruta [study-pair] or book club, or just by friends getting together for coffee or a meal.

Three more guides will be released in the coming year – each will be based around a different Jewish holiday. We hope that you will be as eager to read and use them as we are to share them with you. We look forward to hearing your feedback,

Wishing you a joyful Purim,

Lori Weinstein
Executive Director

Deborah Rosenbloom
Director of Programs

Jewish Women International is the leading Jewish organization working to end violence against women and girls domestically and internationally. JWI’s multifaceted advocacy focuses on the Violence Against Woman Act and the International Violence Against Women Act while JWI’s healthy relationship and financial literacy programs help girls realize the full potential of their personal strength. JWI’s convenes the Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community and the Interfaith Domestic Violence Coalition, which advocates at the national level for anti-violence legislation. For more information, please visit www.jwi.org or contact us at 800.343.2823.
Mar 2012

Shalom,

On behalf of the JWI Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community we are pleased to welcome this wonderful new resource *Rethinking Purim: Women, Relationships and Jewish Texts*. We hope it will be warmly received and widely used throughout the Jewish community. We are grateful to our many organizational partners for their assistance and support in distributing this resource in preparation for the observance of Purim.

This guide combines a respectful reading of classic texts with provocative and perceptive insights, questions and ideas that can help shape healthier relationships. It can help raise awareness of the ways in which issues of gender and power intersect with and can be addressed through such Jewish values as *k’vod ha-briot* (respect for the dignity and integrity of each person) and *kedusha* (sanctification), among others.

We want particularly to thank several members of the Clergy Task Force including Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum who conceived, developed, and took responsibility for the text of Rethinking Purim and Rabbi Amy Bolton, who contributed numerous insights at various stages of the project’s development. We also thank our Task Force members Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin and Cantor Deborah Katchko-Grey for their participation in this project. This project could not have been completed without the support of JWI and in particular Deborah Rosenbloom, JWI’s Director of Programs.

We welcome your reactions to this resource, and hope you will use it in many settings.

With best wishes for a Purim that combines levity and *limmud* (study),

Rabbi Richard Hirsh
Co-Chair, Clergy Task Force

Rabbi Marla Hornsten
Co-Chair, Clergy Task Force
Introduction

Isn’t a grogger – a noisemaker – enough for Purim? Why create a Purim guide?

My colleagues – Rabbi Amy Bolton, Cantor Deborah Katchko-Gray, and JWI Director of Programs Deborah Rosenbloom – and I knew that Jewish women today are making a new kind of ‘noise’ on this holiday by using it as a time to speak out against the mistreatment of women and against abusive relationships. We decided to go a step further and see what Purim could teach us about healthy relationships.

Based on our reading of Megillat Esther, we chose what we consider to be three characteristics of healthy relationships *developing a strong voice, *cultivating the conscious use of self and *striving for parity. We plan to explore more of them in future guides based on other Jewish holidays.

Although the topic of healthy relationships is a serious one, we hope that – in the spirit of Purim – you’ll leave some time to have a little fun, too. At the end of the guide we ask you to imagine the marriage of Queen Esther and King Achashverosh one year/seven years/ many decades after the surprising chain of events that turns their lives and the Persian kingdom upside down.

Wishing you a happy Purim as well as inspiration and strength from the texts, commentaries, questions, and suggested action plans that follow,

Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is this guide for women only?
A: No, not at all. Since men are often part of the equation of a healthy relationship, we hope they’ll join the conversations that this guide tries to encourage.

Q: The guide doesn’t seem to follow the order of the story in the *megillah*. Am I mixed up or is the guide mixed up?
A: Neither! We deliberately took a thematic approach to the story instead of a sequential approach.

Q: I’m going to be facilitating these discussions with a group that is not familiar with Purim. Do you have any suggestions on how to use the guide?
A: In that case, take a few minutes to relate the highlights of the Purim story before using the guide.

Q: Study and conversations sound interesting, but is there a follow up?
A: As Jews, we know that study and action complement one another; save some time for browsing the *Suggestions for Action* at the end of the guide. If there’s enough interest, ask the group to form a small committee responsible for planning the next steps.

Q: How can my study group use this guide?
A: There are a number of ways to use the guide. We suggest starting by briefly sharing why you think this topic is an important one for the group to discuss. Some study groups find it meaningful to ask participants to either say aloud or think of the name of someone in whose honor or memory they want to devote this study. Then ask participants to read the text(s) (either in English, Hebrew or both) and the commentary that follows, aloud. Use the accompanying questions and prompts to begin the conversations.

If you can’t cover all the material in one study group session, then consider using the guide at a second session. Alternatively, you might want to browse through the entire guide and select one section for your study and focus, including the suggestions for action. Your group may be inspired to take action beyond the time allocated for the study group, and hopefully the guide will spark conversations that continue after the formal time allocated for the study group.
Q: I’m a rabbi and I’m going to be delivering a sermon related to Purim the Shabbat before. How can I use the material in this guide?

A: You may want to begin a congregational conversation by choosing one of the themes and texts for your d’var torah. You may also want to make the guide available to the entire synagogue through your listserv and encourage groups such as the sisterhood to hold a study group session to discuss the entire guide. We hope you’ll find many creative ways to use this guide to deepen the experience of Purim!

Q: I don’t belong to any study groups but I’m intrigued by this material. How can I use it?

A: You may choose to share the guide with a friend or two and discuss over coffee. Your discussion may range from ten minutes or continue on for several weeks. Our goal is to start thought-provoking conversations – whether they start during a formal study group or over a latte.

Q: I’m responsible for programming at my Hillel – how can we use this study guide?

A: Since college is such an important time to think and talk about relationships - healthy or otherwise - we hope you’ll have the leeway to plan an entire program based on this guide right before Purim or perhaps use it for a discussion at a Shabbat meal the week of Purim.

Q: I’m going to be hosting a Purim seudah [festive meal on Purim day] for friends and family. I’d love to use this material. Any ideas?

A: What a great opportunity to study, begin new conversations – and munch on hamentashen at the same time. To encourage maximum participation around the table, you may want to provide your guests with copies beforehand by emailing them the link to the guide.

Q: My book-group meets every month and we often wind up talking more about relationships than about the book we’ve been assigned. Do you think this guide would make a good alternative for one session?

A: (Funny, our book groups do that too.) Yes, although the group may choose to gloss over the texts and focus more on the conversation prompts and questions. But please be sure everyone is familiar with the Purim story first so that no one feels left out. Alternatively, read Megillat Esther as the book choice and then use this guide for a discussion about relationships.

Q: Are you planning to write more guides like this one for other holidays?

A: Yes, this is the first in a series of Women, Relationships and Jewish Texts guides that we will be producing this year. If you’d like to get on our distribution list, please email Deborah Rosenbloom at drosenbloom@jwi.org.

Jewish Women International • www.jwi.org
The Goal: Healthy Relationships

Back in the day...
If you’re a Jewish woman, you likely have memories of coming dressed as Queen Esther to the annual Purim Carnival. Who would choose to appear as her unlucky predecessor, Vashti? It's likely that, either way, you didn't belabor the details: it was enough to show up in a velveteen party dress with a dime-store tiara and a little lipstick, or perhaps in a princess costume left over from the previous year or handed down from a big sister.

How would we costume ourselves today, as adults, for Purim?
For some of us, the casual simplicity of our youthful connection to the Purim story has evolved along with our own evolving connection to Judaism – and along with Judaism’s evolving understanding of the condition of women’s lives. In our time, Esther has been both exalted for her womanly heroism and criticized for her use of traditional femininity to achieve her goal, the rescue of the Jews of Persia. And Vashti has been reclaimed by some feminists as a heroic victim who stood up to the excesses of male domination, in stark contrast to her unflattering representation by some of our rabbinic era commentators. We can find her in the Talmud, for instance, depicted as haughty and cruel (especially to Jewish women), the complete opposite of the virtuous Esther.

Can we agree on what 'healthy' means?
In recent years, much creativity has gone into expanding the scope and significance of Purim (and in some cases, the day preceding it, known as Ta’anit Esther, the Fast of Esther). It is no longer so unusual to find Purim programs that include awareness of important contemporary issues such as the plight of agunot [Jewish women whose husbands refuse to grant them a religious divorce], the prevalence of sex trafficking, and the need to support victims of domestic violence or intimate partner abuse.

In this guide, we take a different approach. We focus on the intertwined stories of Esther and Vashti to help us learn more about what healthy relationships can look like in our time. But we prefer to define 'healthy' without resorting to personal, subjective notions like "I'm not sure what a healthy relationship is, but it's got to be the opposite of my mother's/sister's/friend's/my own previous experience" or "whatever it is, it's not what group X or their rabbis say."
We believe that all women seeking healthy relationships are on a path that includes:

• **developing a strong 'voice'**

  We mean both a positive self-identity and identification with something larger than oneself, say, the Jewish people, a community, or a particular cause.

• **cultivating a conscious use of self**

  By this we mean being deliberate about how we present ourselves and use our own physical and spiritual resources.

• **striving for parity**

  Parity is more than an abstract idea of equality; it is a balance in the amount of power or status held by each partner in a relationship.
Section 1: Developing a strong 'voice' – positive self-identity and identification with something larger than oneself

Text • Megillat Esther • Chapter 4:13 – 17

Read aloud:
Then Mordecai returned this answer to Esther: Not for a moment should you think that by being in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, then relief and rescue will come to the Jews from another place but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Then Esther sent this answer to Mordecai: Go, gather together all the Jews in Shushan, and fast for me, and do not eat or drink for three days and three nights; I and my servant girls will also fast. Then I will go to the king, although it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.

So Mordecai went on his way and did all that Esther had commanded him to do.

Commentary

Wendy Amsellem, an orthodox Jewish feminist and contemporary scholar, notes how Esther finds her own voice by developing a strong self-identity:

This is a moment of crisis for Esther. She is caught between conflicting obediences to her foster father and husband. In addition, to come before the king unsummoned is an abnegation of her role as Vashti’s replacement. She was chosen to be queen since she represented the antithesis of Vashti's persona. Esther's position, her identity, and quite possibly her life are all closely tied to her obedience to the king.

Continued on next page
In this moment of fate, Esther looks into her mirror and discovers that she does not look quite so different from Vashti after all. She takes matters into her own hands and stands up to both sources of authority. Esther assumes control of Mordechai’s plan, changing and amending as she sees fit. Like Vashti, she will appear before the king only when she decides that the time is right – in this case after three days of fasting. Instead of following Mordechai’s suggestion and simply making her petition, she will throw a series of parties as Vashti did. In order to succeed, Esther realizes that she must take on aspects of the repudiated former queen.

From The Mirror Has Two Faces: An Exploration of Esther and Vashti, by Wendy Amsellem, in JOFA Journal (Winter 2003), p. 7. Used with permission from JOFA. Wendy Amsellem is pursuing a PhD in Judaic Studies at New York University and has a BA in History and Literature from Harvard University.

Text • Megillat Esther • Chapter 7:1 – 3

Read aloud:

So the king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen. And the king said again to Esther on the second day at the wine banquet, What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. What is your request? It shall be fulfilled, even to half of the kingdom.

Then Esther the queen answered, saying, If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life and the life of my people be given by my asking and entreating.
Commentary

*Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin* reflects on the importance of identifying with something larger than oneself, just as Esther does when she speaks of "my life and that of my people":

The Kotzker Rebbe once asked an honored visitor: “Why was humankind created? Why are we humans here on earth?” The visitor replied: “Each person is created to work on their spirit, to repair their soul.” “No,” railed the Kotzker. “That’s selfish idolatry. That’s not why God put us here on this earth. We were created to keep the heavens aloft.”

Our lives, the Kotzker teaches us, are not about ourselves alone. We must engage in the struggles and injustices of the world. We keep the heavens aloft by our deeds of caring and goodness. Esther grew to realize this, to see that the world around her would collapse if she did not do her part to hold it up. She saw that she grew stronger by defending others and that she, herself, would be saved only by saving the world around her. To hold up the heavens for others is to hold up the heavens for ourselves.

This teaching about our purpose on earth is captured in Proverbs 10:25: “The righteous are the pillars of the world.” This does not mean we will never make mistakes, never shirk our duty and never falter. We all have our moments of fear and weakness. Though Proverbs 10:30 piously promises, “The righteous of the world never stumble,” Rashi offers a comforting clarification: “The righteous may stumble, but when they do, they don’t stay down. They get right back up again.”

And in that momentary lapse, the world will not crumble, because just as we bore the weight of the heavens for others, others are now holding the heavens aloft for us.

*Rabbi Cardin is a member of JWI's Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community and was honored as a JWI Woman to Watch in 2010. She received her ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Rabbi Cardin’s publications include* The Tapestry of Jewish Time: A Spiritual Guide to Holidays and Life Cycle Events and Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: a Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss.

Conversations

1. What do you think gives Esther the strength, at this moment, to take matters into her own hands?

2. In the commentary above, Rabbi Cardin notes that Esther "saw that she grew stronger by defending others and that she, herself, would be saved only by saving the world around her. To hold up the heavens for others is to hold up the heavens for ourselves." Can you share a personal experience of holding the heavens aloft for others and of having others hold the heavens aloft for you? How did each experience make you feel?
Section 2: Cultivating a conscious use of self

Text • Megillat Esther • Chapter 5:1, 2

Three days later Esther clothed herself in majesty [or, donned royalty] and stood in the courtyard of the king’s palace, the innermost part. When the king, sitting on his royal throne, saw Esther the queen standing at the entrance he was pleased and held out to her the golden scepter that was in his hand. So Esther drew near and touched the top of the scepter.

Commentary

Dr. Adele Berlin, author of The JPS Bible Commentary: Esther comments on Esther’s use of her physical resources.

Hebrew: “She dressed in royalty.” She is dressed in her best for this important occasion, and, more to the point, she is dressed in her official garb as queen....Targum Sheni captures the sense of royalty in its expanded description: ‘She then adorned herself with the jewelry that queens adorn themselves-she put on a royal garment, embroidered with the fine gold of Ophir, a fine silk dress encrusted with precious stones’...The Targum’s description of African gold and gems is faintly reminiscent of the gifts brought by the Queen of Sheba (I Kings 10:2, 10-11), another queen who came for a formal audience with the king. It strengthens the impression that Esther dressed herself for a royal business meeting, not for a seduction scene (as in chapter 2). Although they may share the element of putting on jewelry with the “dress for success” motif of royal appearances, preparations for seduction have slightly different convention, focusing on the preparations of the body-washing, anointing....

From The JPS Bible Commentary, Esther. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001, p. 51, note 1, by Adele Berlin. Dr. Berlin is the Robert H. Smith Professor of Hebrew Bible Emerita at the University of Maryland and author of seven books and numerous articles. She edited The Hebrew Study Bible, which won a National Jewish Book Award in 2004.
Commentary

_Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum_ suggests that Esther not only has access to the right clothes, but to something more:

Waking up in the middle of the night with a splitting headache, how do we find our way to the medicine cabinet? Probably with a sense other than seeing: our bare feet, perhaps, can feel carpet, then wood, then finally, tile. Our hands know when to protect the rest of us – just in case our partner has left that closet door ajar, again. Our ears listen for the special creak in the floorboards near the raised threshold to the bathroom. On the way back, our noses might catch the scent of the dog sleeping by the side of the bed and tell us we're almost there. But when staying in others' homes or hotels, we don't have the luxury of such non-visual knowing. So we carry a flashlight or leave a nightlight on – and still feel disoriented.

And so it may happen when we have pain that can't be relieved by a pill. If we don't have familiarity with the inner-most 'rooms' in ourselves and, at the same time a sense of our whole house and where our house is located in the larger world, we may feel disoriented and confused when emotional pain strikes or worsens. It is good to get to know ourselves, deeply, before such a time – through prayer, through regular walks, through keeping a journal or engaging in some other contemplative, spirit-building exercise. Such familiarity may prove to be life-sustaining, even life-saving.

The story of Purim, as told in Megillat Esther, makes no mention of the Divine. Not one word. Thus the Divine Presence, the _Anochi_ ["I"] is like the "I" of Deuteronomy 31:18, says Rabbi Yitzhak Huttner (1906-1980) in _Pahad Yitzhak_: "I – the One Who is surely concealed." The text of Purim asks us to "see" the Divine with our other senses, since the Divine cannot be seen in the text. We might even say that Purim demands an inner knowledge akin to what we know about our homes and the habits of those who inhabit them with us as we go for aspirin in the middle of the night.

Rabbi Huttner concludes that "the redemption of Purim [i.e., the sense of rescue, safety, and connection that is offered by Purim], [the one holiday] which taught Israel to discover the _Anochi_ [the "I"] in darkness and concealment, will surely remain as an enduring achievement in the soul of Israel... All the other holidays will [eventually] be annulled – except for Purim." What, no more Passover? Yom Kippur? Sukkot or Hanukkah or Shavuot? No, says Rabbi Huttner, implying that the original Pesach (at the beginning of the Jewish year according to one way of counting, in the springtime month of Nissan) required much in the way of Divine intervention, especially in the form of miracles. Purim (at the end of the year of which Nissan is considered the first month), required no seen miracles, but much in the way of human initiative.

Will we, like Esther, be ready to take the initiative for redemption – for rescue, safety, connection – especially when we, too, feel like we're beginning in the dark?

_Rabbi Kirshbaum is a member of JWI’s Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community and serves a Reconstructionist congregation in Princeton, NJ. She is a contributor to JWI’s revised Clergy Guide, to the Project S.A.R.A.H. website, and to A Guide to Jewish Practice: Everyday Living, a winner of the 2011 National Jewish Book Awards in the category of Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice._

13

Jewish Women International • www.jwi.org
Conversations

1. What is the role of clothing/styles of dress in Megillat Esther? (You may want to take a few minutes and quickly go through the megillas to find all the places where it is mentioned). To what extent is clothing used to identify a person's status or current role in this story?

2. In the first commentary to this section's text, Dr. Berlin implies that here in chapter 5 of the megilla, Esther becomes conscious about her appearance and how she will use it. Today some might call such behavior ‘manipulative’ – that is, consciously using dress and/or physical attributes to gain an advantage. But clearly Esther needed to do even more than gain an advantage: her goal was unquestionably honorable, even life-saving, for herself and her people. Would you say she was being manipulative? How else might you describe the decision to use what you wear or "what you've got" in the way of physical or spiritual attributes in order to make life better for yourself or others?

3. Some commentators have suggested that, more than choosing a particular dress for the occasion, Esther chooses to tap her spiritual resources at this moment in the story and thus is able to make a more compelling case to the king. Can you recall a time when you've "dressed for success" – and succeeded? What do you think made you successful in that moment?
Section 3: Striving for parity

Text • Megillat Esther • Chapter 1:9 – 12

Read aloud:
Vashti the queen also made a banquet for the women in the royal palace that belonged to King Achashverosh. On the seventh day when the king’s heart was merry with wine, he commanded...the seven eunuchs who served him to bring Vashti the queen before him wearing [only] the royal crown, to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was beautiful to look at. But Vashti the queen refused to come at the king’s command; the king was very angry and his anger burned in him.

Text • Midrash from the Talmud on Megillat Esther • Megila 12b

Read aloud:
The megillah says, "On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine..." Was, therefore, his heart not merry with wine until then? Rab said: The seventh day was the Sabbath, when Israel eats and drinks. Israel begins with discourse on the Torah and with words of praise [to the Holy One]. But the nations of the world, the idolaters, when they eat and drink they only begin with words of frivolity. And so it happened at the feast of that wicked one [Achashverosh]: some [of his nobles] said, "the Median women are the most beautiful" and others said, "the Persian women are the most beautiful." King Achashverosh answered them, "The vessel that I use is neither Median nor Persian but Chaldean. Would you like to see her?"
Commentary

Rabbi Dov Linzer implies that parity between men and women – that is, a state of balance in which men and women have equal power or status – may only be possible in situations where men take responsibility for learning to see women as more than objects of sexual gratification:

...At heart, we are talking about a blame-the-victim mentality. It shifts the responsibility of managing a man’s sexual urges from himself to every woman he may or may not encounter. It is a cousin to the mentality behind the claim, “She was asking for it.” So the responsibility is now on the woman. To protect men from their sexual thoughts, women must remove their femininity from their public presence, ridding themselves of even the smallest evidence of their own sexuality.

The Talmud...acknowledges that men can be sexually aroused by women and is indeed concerned with sexual thoughts and activity outside of marriage. But it does not tell women that men’s sexual urges are their responsibility. Rather, both the Talmud and the later codes of Jewish law make that demand of men. It is forbidden for a man to gaze sexually at a woman, whether beautiful or ugly, married or unmarried, says the Talmud. Later Talmudic rabbis extended this ban even to “her smallest finger” and “her brightly colored clothing – even if they are drying on the wall.”

To make [this] the woman’s responsibility is to demand that Jewish women cover their hands and not dry their clothes in public. No one has ever said this. At least not yet. The Talmud tells the religious man, in effect: If you have a problem, you deal with it. It is the male gaze – the way men look at women – that needs to be desexualized, not women in public. The power to make sure men don’t see women as objects of sexual gratification lies within men’s – and only men’s – control.

Jewish tradition teaches men and women alike that they should be modest in their dress. But modesty is not defined by, or even primarily about, how much of one’s body is covered. It is about comportment and behavior. It is about recognizing that one need not be the center of attention. It is about embodying the prophet Micah’s call for modesty: learning “to walk humbly with your God.”

Commentary

*Deborah Rosenbloom, JWI’s Director of Programs, observes:*

In the *midrash*, the king refers to his wife as a vessel. From this we learn that he considers his wife solely as a means of satisfying his sexual needs. He shows a lack of respect for her and as a result, devalues her as a human being. In a healthy relationship, each partner values and respects the other, in all their complexity as a human being.

Conversations

1. In the *midrash* we see that King Achashverosh and Queen Vashti are not equal in terms of power or status, nor are they partners united in their goals and values. Although both are "royals", the king commands his wife to do something for him. Do you think she knew what the consequences would be for her if she refused? Why would she refuse? What does this say about Vashti’s character?

2. The *megillah* text notes that the king was "merry with wine." Are we meant to think that if he had not been drunk, he would not have behaved this way? How does addiction, either to alcohol or something else, affect the dynamics of a relationship, the give-and-take of power, or the ability to negotiate about how decisions are made and by whom?

3. Consider Esther's power and status by the end of the story. Try to imagine her marriage to Achashverosh after another year has gone by. Can you project what their relationship will be like in seven more years? What might their story look like after a lifetime? In what ways will their marriage need to change in order for you to call it a healthy relationship?
Section 4: Acting on our learning

From Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers, Chapter 1:17 we learn “The essential thing is not study, but action.” Here are a few ideas that we hope will inspire you to take the next step, even as conversations and exploration of healthy relationships continue.

1. Donate the cost of any meals you forgo on Ta'anit Esther [the Fast of Esther, a day before Purim] to a domestic violence shelter in your community.

2. Collect professional clothes to donate to a battered women’s shelter or a homeless shelter, or a local chapter of Dress for Success.

3. Invite a judge, attorney, counselor, survivor, social worker, or representative from a battered women's shelter to speak about her/his experience with domestic violence issues and prevention.

4. Provide this short guide, Embracing Justice: A Guide for Jewish Clergy on Domestic Abuse, 2011 Updated Edition, to your rabbi and cantor and encourage them to speak openly about the importance of healthy relationships. The guide is located at www.jwi.org/clergy along with other resources for clergy.


6. Become an advocate for legislation that promotes the well-being of women and girls by joining JWI’s action network and learn more about our organization and work at www.jwi.org.

7. Make a contribution to support JWI’s programs and projects that work to end gender based violence, promote financial literacy and economic security, and celebrate women’s leadership, at www.jwi.org.