



DO NOT STAND IDLY BY

Reflections on Darfur  
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As I drove my children home after school, how many men, women, and children were fleeing from their homes this week in Darfur? As I tucked my children snugly into their beds, how many mothers crept out of their refugee camps at night to gather firewood to keep their children warm this week in Darfur? As I flew to our nation's capital in support of our government's commitment to justice in Sudan, how many villages were burned to the ground by the government-backed militia (known as the Janjeweid) this week in Darfur?

In the shadow of the Jefferson Memorial and with the Washington Memorial just across the Basin, we ended Shabbat. *Bimheira v'yameinu yavo eileinu, im mashiach ben David.* Speedily in our days, may [Elijah the prophet] come with the messiah, son of David.

These words we sing as we usher in the new week. Hoping, praying that this will be the week that will see the coming of the messianic time. This week is different. We, who stand over two hundred strong, are thinking of a people thousands of miles away who truly need that peace and need it right now. The victims of the genocide in Darfur so very present in our hearts as we pray together.

A military helicopter flies directly over us and we pay no attention. If I were a woman in Darfur, that very same helicopter would strike fear within me. A military helicopter in Darfur signifies not safety but the beginning of a raid by the Janjeweid. How fortunate I am, O God, to be a thousand worlds away. And how ashamed I feel to even utter those words.

I sleep fitfully. What am I doing here? What real impact will this gathering really have? Several thousand people gathering on the Mall cannot end the suffering. Our Tradition gives us only two instances where we are actively commanded to seek out opportunities to fulfill a particular commandment. They are "Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms 34:15) and "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20). *Rodef.* To pursue. To be one who pursues peace. One who pursues justice. Pursue – it is such an active word. During the restless night, I realize that my presence here is not merely a symbolic act nor should I view it as an act of passivity. Rather, by being here and joining my voice with many others, I have become a *rodefet*. I have become one who pursues.

This is to be a family reunion of sorts. I am joined by my mother, my brothers, my sister, one of my sisters-in-law, and her cousin. Completing the Amado-Einstein-Schorr group is my young cousin whose mother had introduced me to activism by encouraging me to write letters on behalf of the Refusniks two decades ago. How proud I am to stand with

over one hundred Jews from Los Angeles, an effort coordinated by Jewish World Watch and the Jewish Federation-Council of Greater Los Angeles.. And our group stands amongst groups from congregations, day schools, Hillel students, JCCs and other Jewish groups from all across North America. Over fifteen-thousand people. Young and old, we have come together with a unified purpose.

Jews marching for Jews. Self-explanatory. But Jews marching for African Muslims? Why? Why stand up for a group of people whose lives have no impact on mine?

Because my faith demands it of me. Because I cannot be angry at the world for allowing six million of my people to be slaughtered if I am not willing to raise my voice in protest for the Darfurians.

The association of Darfur with the Shoah is a natural one for us. When we hear phrases such as 'ethnic cleansing' and 'relocation,' we know all too well what these euphemisms are concealing; the organized destruction of a people.

Many of the signs reflect our natural instinct to draw connections between the realities of Darfur and the memories of our recent past. Signs bearing the slogans "Never Again," "Never Forget," and "Save Darfur" are in English and Hebrew. And there are others. A refugee from Liberia, with the Texas flag draped over his shoulders, carries a sign declaring "I saw it, I escaped it, stop it now!" Three co-eds from the University of Iowa drove all night to hold signs that say "to remain silent and indifferent is the greatest sin of all." A high schooler from Boston wrote the words "Schindler's List, The Killing Fields, Hotel Rwanda. Don't wait for the movie."

Now what? What do I do now that the March is over? I don't have the international respect of Elie Wiesel whose mere presence is a constant reminder of what can happen when the world remains silent in the face of evil. I don't have the political clout of Senator Barack Obama whose impassioned words elicited great cheers from the crowd. Nor do I have the popular attention of George Clooney whose recent visit to Darfur just last week will do more to forward this cause than a dozen marches. What I do have is the desire to see the genocide brought to an end. I can write to President Bush. I can make responsible choices in the voting booth. I can stand in front of the consulates of NATO and African Union nations, Russia, and China between now and June 2nd, a day that corresponds this year with the day we celebrate God's revelation at Sinai. How fitting that these visits, as suggested by Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, will "be taking place during the counting of the Omer, in which we move from the freedom given us at Passover to the responsibility that came with accepting God's laws at Sinai." I can receive regular email updates from the Save Darfur Coalition ([www.savedarfur.org](http://www.savedarfur.org)) and American Jewish World Service ([www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)). I can encourage my colleagues to join with the more than forty Southern Californian congregations who have already become active members of Jewish World Watch. And I can continue to talk about Darfur with my friends, congregants, and neighbours.

Speedily in our days, O God, speedily in our days may this nightmare end and may our brothers and sisters in Darfur know enduring peace. May this be Your Will.