ברכות לפני המגילה

- On Purim night, the megillah may only be read after nightfall.
- Follow the megillah carefully as it is crucial to hear every word.
- Before the blessings are made, the megillah is folded into three sections. (For more laws see p. 95.)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל מִקְרָא מְגִלָּה:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בִּזְמַן הַזֶּה:

- This Blessing is recited even on Purim Day. (Have in mind also that it applies to the other Mitzvos of the day.)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ
וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לִזְמַן הַזֶּה:

Blessings before the Megillah

- On Purim night, the Megillah may only be read after nightfall.
- Follow the Megillah carefully as it is crucial to hear every word.
- Before the blessings are made, the Megillah is folded into three sections. (For more laws see p. 95.)

Blessed are You, God our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us about reading the Megillah.

Blessed are You, God our God, King of the universe, who enacted miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

- This Blessing is recited even on Purim Day. (Have in mind also that it applies to the other Mitzvos of the day.)

Blessed are You, God our God, King of the universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

א וַיְהִי בִּימֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
הַמֹּלֵךְ מֵהֹדּוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה
מְדִינָה: ב בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם כְּשֶׁבֶת | הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ עַל
כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה: ג בִּשְׁנַת שָׁלוֹשׁ
לְמָלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֶּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וַעֲבָדָיו חֵיל | פָּרַס
וּמָדַי הַפַּרְתְּמִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינוֹת לְפָנָיו: ד בְּהַרְאֹתוֹ

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **Why does the Megillah open by describing the greatness of Ahasuerus? (v. 1)**

Alshich: This brings to light the greatness of the miracle. King Ahasuerus was so powerful that he was not subject to external political pressure.

● **Why did he make a feast only in the third year of his rule? (v. 3)**

Ibn Ezra: For the first two years he was dealing with rebellious provinces. Alternatively, this was his celebratory wedding feast for his marriage to Vashti.

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וַיְהִי בִּימֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ — *This took place in the days of Ahasuerus....*

The abundance of seemingly irrelevant detail here is striking. If the Megillah's purpose is to recount Haman's attempted genocide of the Jewish people and its miraculous subversion, then this lengthy description of Ahasuerus' political influence and his social excesses appears to be of little or no relevance. Why do we need to know that Ahasuerus ruled over exactly one hundred and twenty seven provinces, and of their precise geographical boundaries? Why do we need to be informed that he made a banquet for his ministers, with a detailed guest list, and yet another banquet for all the inhabitants of Shushan?

Of course from this introductory passage we do get a rich sense of the historical setting, but the scriptures never offer gratuitous historical narrative that is devoid of any ethical or spiritual content. What, then, is the Megillah teaching us here?

Has it ever bothered you that most of your life feels like a waste of time? As pleasurable as eating, sleeping and recreation may be, they are not *meaningful* experiences that satisfy the hunger for purpose in life. And yet it is these activities that consume most of your time. If you were to count the hours of your life when you actually have the opportunity to be *homo sapiens*, utilizing your higher faculties of intelligence for the benefit of yourself and others, you would find that they are disturbingly low, especially when you consider that many years of immaturity are wasted in childhood. Have you ever pondered why this is the case?

Think about it rationally. Life is far too sophisticated to have simply come into being by chance. Such wonders as the staggering complexity of human physiology and the intricacy of the subatomic world point clearly to the existence of a higher coordinating power. But that same higher power which has ordained us with a formidable intellect and a hunger for meaning, has denied us, for most of our lives, the opportunity to use it!

To address this very issue—of existential futility and pain—the Megillah begins with a treatment of some seemingly irrelevant details about the internal affairs of Ahasuerus' kingdom (and it also ends with some apparently trivial details of Ahasuerus' tax laws—10:1). The message here is that in the "Megillah" of life, a lot of things will inevitably seem pointless, *but that does not mean that they are futile.* Just as the text would be incomplete without these passages, your life would be lacking without those moments which, to you, seem devoid of meaning.

CHAPTER ONE

The Feast of Ahasuerus

1 This took place in the days of Ahasuerus—that Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from Hodu to Cush. **2** In those days, when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the capital, **3** in the third year of his reign, he made a banquet for all his ministers and servants, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the provincial ministers being present, **4** when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the

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The antidote, therefore, to existential pain is intellectual humility: to realize that the same G–d who fashioned this wondrous universe simply must have a plan for every single detail, even if we cannot always fathom it.

(Based on *Sichas Purim* 5744, par. 8-11)

בִּימֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ — *In the days of Ahasuerus....*

Why does the Megillah, whose primary focus is Esther, Mordechai and the Jews, open with the chronicles of Ahasuerus, the non-Jewish king of Persia?

While G–d's name is not mentioned explicitly in the Megillah, a Kabbalistic *Midrash* finds it alluded to in the name Ahasuerus (*Achashverosh*): *"the beginning (acharis) and the end (reishis) are His"* (*Midrash* cited in *Me'orei Ohr* 1:182).

Extending the analogy further, if Ahasuerus alludes to the Divine, then "*the days* of Ahasuerus" could be understood as hinting to *a disclosure* of the Divine, daytime being associated with light and revelation.

This, however, seems uncomfortably distant from the literal meaning of the words. How are we to reconcile the fact that at the exoteric level, scripture speaks of the chronicles of a Persian king, while esoterically it speaks of a disclosure of sublime Divinity?

But is that not, after all, the wonder of Purim, that an awesome miracle occurred within the norms of nature; that the providential care of the-One-to-whom-the-beginning-and-end-belong was evident *even through the actions of the lowly King Ahasuerus?*

So the Megillah opens with Ahasuerus because he was ultimately the *target* of the revelation, the "location" of the miracle.

(Based on *Sichas Purim* 5750, par. 4)

מֵהֹדּוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ — *From Hodu to Cush*

Chasidic discourses perceive here a hint, not only to the vast geography of Ahasuerus' kingdom, but also to the variety of their temperaments. Hodu is a derivative of the Hebrew word *hod,* "glory," suggesting illumination; Cush, on the other hand, means "dark," suggesting an impoverishment of light. In Ahasuerus' one hundred and twenty-seven provinces there were both enlightened communities, as well as those who were ignorant and uncouth. This would later prove troublesome for the Jews as it would mean that Ahasuerus' decree against them would be well accepted in a wide range of social circles due to his broad, cross-communal popularity.

(Based on *Sichah* of Purim 5744, par. 13)

אֶת־עֹשֶׁר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת־יְקָר תִּפְאֶרֶת גְּדוּלָּתוֹ
יָמִים רַבִּים שְׁמוֹנִים וּמְאַת יוֹם: ה וּבִמְלֹאוֹת* | הַיָּמִים
הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל־הָעָם הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן
הַבִּירָה לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד־קָטָן מִשְׁתֶּה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּחֲצַר
גִּנַּת בִּיתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ: ו חוּר | כַּרְפַּס וּתְכֵלֶת אָחוּז בְּחַבְלֵי־
בוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן עַל־גְּלִילֵי כֶסֶף וְעַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ מִטּוֹת | זָהָב
וָכֶסֶף עַל רִצְפַת בַּהַט־וָשֶׁשׁ וְדַר וְסֹחָרֶת: ז וְהַשְׁקוֹת
בִּכְלֵי זָהָב וְכֵלִים מִכֵּלִים שׁוֹנִים וְיֵין מַלְכוּת רָב כְּיַד
הַמֶּלֶךְ: ח וְהַשְׁתִּיָה כַּדָּת אֵין אֹנֵס כִּי־כֵן | יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל
כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹן אִישׁ־וָאִישׁ: ס ט גַּם וַשְׁתִּי

*וּבִמְלֹאוֹת כ'

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **Why are we told the details of the lavish fixtures? (v. 6)**

Maharal: Ahasuerus made the setting of this feast a replica of the Tabernacle, complete with hangings, columns and marble "sockets."

● **What was the "drinking rule"? (v. 8)**

Rashi: There are banquets where the attendants are coerced to drink from a large cup, and some people can drink it only with difficulty. But here, no one was coerced.

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לְכָל הָעָם הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן ... מִשְׁתֶּה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים — *A banquet for seven days, for all the people found in Shushan.*

In grappling to understand why the Jews of Persia might have incurred such Divine wrath as to have faced annihilation, the Talmudic sages pointed to various possible explanations. One of their more alarming suggestions, which has invited much commentary over the generations, is that these Jews deserved to be destroyed because *"they enjoyed the banquet of that wicked man"* (*Megillah* 12a).

What was the terrible sin here? One view, espoused by the *Midrash*, is that the Jews acted inappropriately at the banquet by eating non-kosher food (*Shir ha-Shirim Rabah* 7:8), but clearly this is not a sin for which a person would deserve to die, G–d forbid.

Regardless of whether or not they had arranged kosher food, the Jews' grave error here, in the *Talmud's* understanding, was that they *enjoyed* the banquet. They considered it a privilege that Jews had been invited and they took tremendous pleasure in the fact that they had gained acceptance and security in the host culture. This was misguided because in doing so they were effectively placing their trust in "that wicked man," rather than in G–d; they were turning to other forms of security.

Of course, it is always necessary to respect the local culture and prevailing authorities (so long as they do not demand that we violate Torah law or custom), but we should never mistake their goodwill as a substitute for G–d's providence.

G–d's supernatural protection is provided for us only when we trust and rely on it. Failure to do so

splendor of his majesty—for many days, one hundred and eighty days.

5 And when these days were complete, the king made a banquet for seven days, for all the people found in Shushan, the capital, great and small alike, in the courtyard of the king's palace garden, 6 with white, green and blue hangings, embroidered with cords of linen and purple wool, on silver rods and marble columns; couches of gold and silver, on a floor of alabastar and marble in rows and circles. 7 Drinks were served in golden vessels, each of the vessels differing from all the other vessels, and royal wine was in abundance, according to the king's means. 8 But the drinking rule was not enforced, for this is what the king had established with all the many staff of his house: to comply with each man's will.

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **With whose will did the king wish to comply? (v. 8)**

Talmud: With the will of both Mordechai and Haman (*Megillah* 12a).

Midrash: G–d said, "I do not depart from the rules of My creation and yet you wish to comply with each man's will? According to the way of the world, if two men wish to marry the same woman, may they do so?

If when two ships leave the harbor, one ship requires a northerly wind and the other a southerly wind, can one wind satisfy them both? It must be either one or the other (*Esther Rabah* 2:14).

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means that we leave ourselves open to natural political dangers and threats. As *"one sheep among seventy wolves"* (*Esther Rabah* 10:11), Jewish survival has always depended on countless acts of miraculous intervention from Above to save us from hostile neighbors.

This was the error of the Jews of Persia: they attributed too much importance to (they "enjoyed") the high status accorded to them by Ahasuerus. By hanging their sense of security on a "wicked man," someone who openly violated the will of G–d, they forfeited G–d's supernatural providence which was crucial to their survival.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 31, p. 170*ff.*)

☙ לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹן אִישׁ וָאִישׁ — *To comply with each man's will.*

The *Midrash* rejected Ahasuerus' desire to comply with the wishes of both Mordechai and Haman as a kind of naive pacifism: *"If two men wish to marry the same woman, does the world allow them to do so?"*

In the *Talmud*, however, the idea of placating both Haman and Mordechai's wishes is presented plausibly, and it is not refuted. So we can presume that, contrary to the *Midrash*, the *Talmud* maintained that it *is* possible to somehow comply with the competing viewpoints.

How do we please both Haman and Mordechai, and why is it at all desirable?

הַמַּלְכָּה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֵּה נָשִׁים בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר
לַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ: ט בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כְּטוֹב לֵב־הַמֶּלֶךְ
בַּיָּיִן אָמַר לִמְהוּמָן בִּזְתָא חַרְבוֹנָא בִּגְתָא וַאֲבַגְתָא זֵתַר
וְכַרְכַּס שִׁבְעַת הַסָּרִיסִים הַמְשָׁרְתִים אֶת־פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ: י לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
בְּכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יָפְיָהּ כִּי־
טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה הִיא: יב וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד וַחֲמָתוֹ
בָּעֲרָה בוֹ: ס יג וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יֹדְעֵי הָעִתִּים כִּי־

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In Judaism, *halachah* (Jewish law) is normative. A violation of the *halachah* is considered unacceptable, and, conversely, observance of the *halachah* is a non-negotiable area of the Jewish religion.

Beyond the area of *halachic* observance, Judaism also has a number of pietistic goals. These are largely aimed at fostering an intimate awareness of G–d even at those times of the day when *halachah* does not provide any formal mode of worship. For example, we are encouraged to reach a level of awareness where, *"All your actions are for the sake of heaven"* (*Avos* 2:12), and, "*In all your ways know Him*" (Proverbs 3:6). While the normative *halachic* Jew may have certain defined periods throughout the day when his attention is fully devoted to G–d, the pietist will aim to achieve a virtually constant awareness that, *"I was created to serve my Master"* (end of *Kidushin*).

Mordechai was an exemplar of the pietist model. He was awarded the appellation "Yehudi" (Jew) for rejecting idol-worship (*Megillah* 13a), which he renounced well beyond the basic, *halachic* minimum of forbidden worship. Mordechai was celebrated as a "Yehudi" because of his utter abhorrence for anything that stood outside the scope of Jewish worship.

One hallmark of the pietist position, which was clearly evident in the case of Mordechai, is a rejection of secular values and culture. If *every* part of life is a form of Jewish worship—"*in all your ways know Him*"—then there simply can be no room for anything that is not based on Judaism. Even when "bowing down to Haman" was technically permissible, Mordechai refused to do so, as it could in no way be construed as an act of *Divine* worship.

On the other hand, our normative, *halachic* Jew, who has not yet ventured into the pietistic path, has plenty of opportunity to be involved with secular matters, so long as they are not in conflict with *halachah*. This Jew *will* "bow down to Haman," because Jewish law says he is entitled to do so, if no *halachic* violation is involved—*"The law of the land is binding"* (*Gittin* 10b).

The practical conflict, therefore, between "Mordechai" (pietistic worship) and "Haman" (normative worship) is essentially the question of acculturation. To the pietist, secular culture is a corruptive force which serves as a detraction from the constant demands of worship. To the normative Jew, some level of cultural immersion is acceptable, so long as *halachic* observance is not compromised. After all, were not all forms of secular law and culture ultimately fashioned by G–d Himself?

Vashti's Rebellion and Judgment

9 Vashti, the queen, also made a banquet for the women, in the royal house of King Ahasuerus.

10 On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas—the seven chamberlains in attendance on King Ahasuerus—**11** to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing the royal crown, to display her beauty to the people and the ministers, for she was attractive in appearance. **12** But when Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's order, conveyed by the chamberlains, the king became extremely angry, and his rage burned within him.

Classic Questions

● **Was the king not at all "merry with wine" until the seventh day? (v. 10)**

Talmud: Rava said: The seventh day was the Sabbath. When Jewish people eat and drink, they begin with words of Torah and with words of praise. But the idolators, when they eat and drink, only begin with words of indecency.

This is what transpired at the feast of that wicked man. Some people said, "Median women are the most beautiful," and others said, "Persian women are the most beautiful."

Ahasuerus said to them, "The vessel that I use is neither Median nor Persian, but Chaldean. Would you like to see her?" (*Megillah* 12b).

Toras Menachem

Can the pietist and normative Jew ever resolve their conflict? Is it theoretically or practically possible to become an "acculturated pietist"?

The *Talmud* was convinced that such a feat *is* possible—that we can "comply with each man's will." Through remaining conscious that G-d transcends the constraints of the world and that He empowers us to do the same, we too have the ability to fuse these two opposites: we actively engage in the culture—the "exile"—and yet we do not *"kneel or bow down"* (below 3:2), remaining intrinsically aloof from it.

(Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayigash* 5752)

בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כְּטוֹב לֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיָּיִן — *On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine.*

The *Talmud's* insight, that the "seventh day" here refers not only to the seventh day of the banquet but also to the Jewish Sabbath, is difficult to fathom. Of what relevance would the Jewish Sabbath have been to Ahasuerus? Surely, idolators will "begin with words of indecency" when they eat and drink on *any* day of the week? And it seems absurd that the discussion of Median, Persian and Chaldean women was in any way connected to the Jewish day of rest.

However, the *Talmud's* words here need to be understood in the context of its prior comment to v. 8: *"The drinking rule was not enforced, for this is what the king had established... to comply with each man's will,"* on which the *Talmud* explains: *"with the will of both Mordechai and Haman"* (*Megillah* 12a).

Now we can safely presume that Mordechai, who was the epitome of Jewish piety, would have had no interest in socializing at Ahasuerus' party and, being that drinking was not enforced, he would not have partaken of any alcohol at all.

כֵּן דְּבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ לִפְנֵי כָּל־יֹדְעֵי דָּת וָדִין: יד וְהַקָּרֹב אֵלָיו
כַּרְשְׁנָא שֵׁתָר אַדְמָתָא תַּרְשִׁישׁ מֶרֶס מַרְסְנָא מְמוּכָן
שִׁבְעַת שָׂרֵי | פָּרַס וּמָדַי רֹאֵי פְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַיֹּשְׁבִים
רִאשֹׁנָה בַּמַּלְכוּת: טו כְּדָת מַה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת בַּמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי
עַל | אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָשְׂתָה אֶת־מַאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים: ס טז וַיֹּאמֶר מְמוּכָן* לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים
לֹא עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עָוְתָה וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה כִּי עַל־כָּל־
הַשָּׂרִים וְעַל־כָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ: יז כִּי־יֵצֵא דְבַר־הַמַּלְכָּה עַל־כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים
לְהַבְזוֹת בַּעְלֵיהֶן בְּעֵינֵיהֶן בְּאָמְרָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
אָמַר לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לְפָנָיו וְלֹא־בָאָה:
יח וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמַרְנָה | שָׂרוֹת פָּרַס־וּמָדַי אֲשֶׁר
שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה לְכֹל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּכְדַי בִּזָּיוֹן

*מְוֻמָכָן כ'

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That is, until the Sabbath. Because, on the Sabbath, Jewish law *requires* a person to enjoy wine (*Rambam, Laws of Sabbath* 30:10), and Mordechai would obviously have had no objection. Thus, it was only on the seventh day that the king became exceptionally merry, as then his intention "to comply with the will of both Mordechai and Haman," and have them both drink willingly together at the same feast, had been realized.

Why did the *Talmud* add, *"When Jewish people eat and drink, they begin with words of Torah and with words of praise*"?

This entire section of the Megillah comes to explain how G–d *"placed the cure before the sickness"* (see *Rashi* to 3:1), positioning Esther as queen in place of Vashti before Haman's offensive against the Jewish people was launched. The reader might therefore be troubled: If the Jews behaved inappropriately at this moment, just like the other Persians, then in what merit did they deserve such wondrous acts of Divine proactive intervention?

The *Talmud,* therefore, is quick to inform us that the Jews were not G–d forbid, acting inappropriately. On the contrary, *"When Jewish people eat and drink, they begin with words of Torah and with words of praise."* It was in this merit that the king would soon be advised to *"give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she"* (v. 19).

How important it is to always *"begin with words of Torah and with words of praise"* whenever Jewish people eat and drink!

(Based on *Sichas Purim* 5730, par. 4)

13 The king consulted sages versed with the times—for it was the royal practice to consult experts in law and judgment. **14** The closest to him were: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven ministers of Persia and Media, who had direct contact with the king, and who ranked highest in the kingdom.

15 *"What ought to be done, according to the law, with Queen Vashti, for failing to comply with the order of the King Ahasuerus, conveyed by the chamberlains?"*

16 Then Memucan declared before the king and the ministers, "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti caused offense, but to all the ministers and all the peoples that are in all King Ahasuerus' provinces. **17** For the queen's behavior will proliferate to all the women, causing them to despise their husbands in their eyes, when they say, 'King Ahasuerus ordered to bring Queen Vashti before him, but she did not come.' **18** And this very day, the ladies of Persia and Media

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **What was the doubt regarding Vashti? Surely anyone disobeying the king is executed? (v. 15)**

Rishon le-Tziyon: Ahasuerus knew that disobeying the king's order carried the punishment of execution but he was hoping that some exception might be found in the case of the queen.

The king's advisors sensed his eagerness to vindicate Vashti, but they argued that even if they could find an exemption it would have disastrous consequences on a national level.

● **Why did the king ask the law? (v. 15)**

Toras Levi Yitzchak: The word *ke-das* (*"according to the law"*) has the numerical value of 424, hinting to the 424 supernal courts of law (see *Zohar* III 129a; 136b), which must judge and prosecute "Vashti" who is symbolic of *kelipah*, the demonic realm (p. 17).

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כְּדָת מַה לַּעֲשׂוֹת בַּמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי — *What ought to be done, according to the law, with Queen Vashti?*

Rishon le-Tziyon is one of many commentators that address the startlingly obvious question why Vashti's punishment required a legal investigation? All monarchical systems work on a simple rule that violating an order of the king is an unpardonable crime, punishable by execution (see below 4:11, that this would apply even to the queen). Why was there any doubt *"what ought to be done, according to the law, with Queen Vashti"?*

וָקֶצֶף: יט אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יֵצֵא דְבַר־מַלְכוּת
מִלְפָנָיו וְיִכָּתֵב בְּדָתֵי פָרַס־וּמָדַי וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־
תָבוֹא וַשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ וּמַלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן
הַמֶּלֶךְ לִרְעוּתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה מִמֶּנָּה: כ וְנִשְׁמַע פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל־מַלְכוּתוֹ כִּי רַבָּה הִיא וְכָל־הַנָּשִׁים
יִתְּנוּ יְקָר לְבַעְלֵיהֶן לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד־קָטָן: כא וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר
בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּדְבַר מְמוּכָן:
כב וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־מְדִינָה
וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָבָהּ וְאֶל־עַם וָעָם כִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ לִהְיוֹת כָּל־אִישׁ
שֹׁרֵר בְּבֵיתוֹ וּמְדַבֵּר כִּלְשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ: ס

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Remarkably, Memucan's lengthy reply (v. 16-20) fails to address the core issue of Vashti's culpability. He mentions only the tertiary effects that pardoning Vashti's acts might have on Persian culture, but no mention is made that she flagrantly disobeyed a written order of the king!

The commentators each offer their own various solutions to this problem, but what is troubling here is why *Rashi*, whose attention is always directed towards questions that arise at the literal level, fails to address the point.

Perhaps we could argue that *Rashi* did not deal with the issue directly as it has already been addressed by one of his previous comments. Verse 8, above, informs us of an important distinction between this seven-day feast which Ahasuerus made for the general public, and the previous one hundred and eighty day feast he had made for his own private circle: *"But the drinking rule was not enforced, for this is what the king had established with all the many staff of his house: to comply with each man's will."*

Who, exactly, were the "staff of his house"? *Rashi* explains: *"all the staff of the banquet: the chief baker, the chief butcher, and the chief butler."*

Clearly, *Rashi* understood that the non-coercive nature of this feast was not limited to the drinking. The *entire staff* of the banquet was instructed to comply with every wish of the attendees.

How did *Rashi* come to this conclusion?

One important key here is the verse's unusual term "this is what the king had *established*" (*yisad*, rather than "instructed," *tzivah*), which suggested to *Rashi* that we are speaking here of a central feature of this banquet that extended to many of its details. In contrast to Ahasuerus' first banquet where the "splendor of his majesty" was demonstrated by his ability to coerce and control others (we can presume that the "drinking rule" *was* followed there), this was a banquet which was "established" on the principle of non-coerciveness and honor to the people.

So when Vashti failed to obey the king's order to be present at the banquet, the question arose: *Since this entire affair was established on the principle of*

who heard of the queen's behavior will repeat it to all the king's ministers, and there will be such scorn and anger!

19 "If it pleases the king, let a royal order be issued by him, and let it be inscribed in the laws of Persia and Media, and let it not be revoked, that Vashti shall never again come before King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she. **20** And let the decision of the king be heard throughout his entire kingdom, although it is large, and then all the women will give honor to their husbands, both great and small."

21 The proposal was favorable to the king and the ministers, and the king followed the suggestion of Memucan. **22** Letters were sent to all the king's provinces—to every province according to its script, and to every nationality according to its language—that every man be the master in his household and speak the language of his own people.

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **Why did Memucan request a royal order, *Devar Malchus*? (v. 19)**

Megillas Setarim: He suggested that from this point onwards Ahasuerus' kingdom should become a dictatorship that would not be answerable to any external legal body. This would later prove crucial to the miracle, as it would be instrumental in Haman's execution.

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non-coerciveness, perhaps she could be excused in this instance?

It could, after all, be argued that she had not *rebelled* against the king, but rather, *fulfilled* his instruction "to comply with each man's will."

Or, perhaps: 1. Vashti's requested appearance was unrelated to the non-coercive clause of the banquet. 2. The king's specific order to Vashti possibly trumped his earlier instruction to "comply with each man's will." 3. The instruction to "comply with each man's will" was intended, perhaps, only for the general public, whom the feast was to honor, and not the queen.

It was due to these uncertainties that Ahasuerus found it necessary to consult his advisors. They, likewise, could not find Vashti culpable beyond reasonable doubt for disobeying the king, and it was only due to the tertiary concerns (v. 16-18) that they proposed her removal.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 36, p. 161*ff.*)

ב א אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כְּשֹׁךְ חֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ זָכַר אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה
וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ: ב וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ מְשָׁרְתָיו
יְבַקְשׁוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ נְעָרוֹת בְּתוּלוֹת טוֹבוֹת מַרְאֶה: ג וְיַפְקֵד
הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים בְּכָל־מְדִינוֹת מַלְכוּתוֹ וְיִקְבְּצוּ אֶת־כָּל־
נַעֲרָה־בְתוּלָה טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה אֶל־שׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל־
בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים אֶל־יַד הֵגֵא סְרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים
וְנָתוֹן תַּמְרֻקֵיהֶן: ד וְהַנַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר תִּיטַב בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
תִּמְלֹךְ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ
כֵּן: ס ה אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה
וּשְׁמוֹ מָרְדְּכַי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן־שִׁמְעִי בֶּן־
קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי: ו אֲשֶׁר הָגְלָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם

Congregation reads this verse aloud before reader.

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **Why is the lineage of Mordechai traced back three generations? (v. 5)**

Talmud: If the purpose here was to trace his lineage then why not continue back to Benjamin?

All these names mentioned in the verse tell us something about Mordechai himself:

"The son of Ya'ir" — he was a son who brightened (*hei'ir*) the eyes of Israel through his prayers.

"The son of Shimei" — he was a son to whose prayers G–d listened (*shama*).

"The son of Kish" — he knocked (*hikish*) at the Gates of Mercy, and they were opened for him (*Megillah* 12b).

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מָרְדְּכַי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן שִׁמְעִי בֶּן קִישׁ — *Mordechai the son of Ya'ir the son of Shimei the son of Kish.*

According to the ***Talmud***, Mordechai's lineage is traced by the Megillah to highlight his prowess in prayer. He *"brightened the eyes of Israel through his prayers... he was a son to whose prayers G–d listened... he knocked at the Gates of Mercy and they were opened for him."* This is surprising when, classically, Mordechai is known for his vast Torah wisdom more than for prolonged or ecstatic prayer. Mordechai was famous both as a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest rabbinical court, and a member of the Great Assembly (see *Menachos* 64b; *Rambam, Mishneh Torah,* author's introduction).

(Even Kabbalistically, the three names Ya'ir, Shimei and Kish allude to the *intellectual* attributes of *chochmah, binah* and *da'as* (wisdom, understand-

Chapter Two

The Search for a New Queen

1 After these events, when King Ahasuerus' anger subsided, he thought of Vashti—and what she had done, and what had been decreed upon her. **2** The king's valets who attended him said, "Let beautiful young girls be sought out for the king. **3** The king will appoint commissioners to all the provinces of his kingdom, and they will gather every beautiful young girl to Shushan the capital, to the harem under the custody of Hege, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, where they will be provided with cosmetics. **4** And let the girl who pleases the king reign instead of Vashti." The suggestion pleased the king, and he acted upon it.

5 There was a Jewish man in Shushan, the capital, whose name was Mordechai the son of Ya'ir the son of Shimei the son of Kish, a Benjamite,

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ing and knowledge), which are primarily engaged in Torah study, and not the emotive faculties that are aroused during prayer.)

If we examine the different mindsets of scholarship and prayer, the contrast becomes even sharper. Genuine prayer demands a profound sense of *inadequacy* before G–d—*"like a slave before his master"* (*Shabbos* 10a). An effective Torah judge, on the other hand, must be endowed with extreme *competence* and sufficient confidence in the correctness of his judgment to render a ruling.

So why does the Megillah—in the *Talmud's* understanding—praise Mordechai here with a quality which would, in all likelihood, prove detrimental to his cause?

A sense of inadequacy before G–d can, paradoxically, foster an inner sense of adequacy. "I myself may be weak and powerless," a person may think, "but through devoting myself to G–d, I am empowered by a Higher Authority." Or, to cite the Sages, *"the servant of a king is a king too"* (*Sifri*).

עִם־הַגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר הָגְלְתָה עִם יְכָנְיָה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר
הָגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל: ז וַיְהִי אֹמֵן אֶת־הֲדַסָּה הִיא
אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־דֹּדוֹ כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וָאֵם וְהַנַּעֲרָה יְפַת־תֹּאַר
וְטוֹבַת מַרְאֶה וּבְמוֹת אָבִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ לְקָחָהּ מָרְדֳּכַי לוֹ
לְבַת: ח וַיְהִי בְּהִשָּׁמַע דְּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ וּבְהִקָּבֵץ נְעָרוֹת
רַבּוֹת אֶל־שׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל־יַד הֵגַי וַתִּלָּקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־
בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־יַד הֵגַי שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים: ט וַתִּיטַב הַנַּעֲרָה
בְּעֵינָיו וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו וַיְבַהֵל אֶת־תַּמְרוּקֶיהָ וְאֶת־
מָנוֹתֶהָ לָתֶת לָהּ וְאֶת שֶׁבַע הַנְּעָרוֹת הָרְאוּיוֹת לָתֶת־
לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיְשַׁנֶּהָ וְאֶת־נַעֲרוֹתֶיהָ לְטוֹב בֵּית
הַנָּשִׁים: י לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מוֹלַדְתָּהּ

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **Why is Esther also called Hadassah? (v. 7)**

Talmud: Rabbi Meir says: Her real name was Esther, but she was also known as Hadassah since the righteous are referred to as myrtles, *hadasim*—"*He was standing among the myrtle bushes*" (Zech. 1:8).

Rabbi Yehudah says: Her real name was Hadassah, but she was called Esther because she used to conceal, *masteres*, her identity: *"Esther would still not tell her lineage"* (below 2:20).

Rabbi Nechemiah says: Her real name was Hadassah but she was called Esther by the non-Jews, comparing her to the moon, *Istahar* (*Megillah* 13a).

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This, it seems, is the spirit of the *Talmud's* comments here. We are not being asked to believe that Mordechai was a timid and meek personality who would spend all his days in prayer. The *Talmud* is fully conscious that we know Mordechai's character to be the powerful, knowledgeable, uncompromising leader. What we learn for the first time now is that Mordechai's sense of adequacy as a Torah scholar was tempered and *enhanced* through the humility fostered by his prayer experience.

As the awareness that he was assisted by a Higher Authority was deepened, and that he was not merely relying on his own mastery and competence of the law, his legal decisions were improved. His sense of connection to G–d even empowered him, when necessary, with an interpretative boldness to endorse unprecedented legal decisions—such as fasting on the festival of Passover (see *Rashi* to 4:17).

So, in the final analysis, Mordechai was very much the knowledgeable, competent Torah scholar. If anything, his sense of inadequacy fostered during times of prayer only served to enhance his decisive-

6 who had been exiled from Jerusalem along with the group that was exiled with Jeconiah, king of Judah, which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had driven into exile. 7 He was a foster father to Hadassah—that is, Esther—his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. This girl was very beautiful and lovely to look at. When her father and mother died, Mordechai took her as a daughter for himself.

Esther is Brought to the Palace

8 What happened was, when the king's order and his decree were heard, many girls were gathered to Shushan the capital, to the custody of Hegai, and Esther was taken to the king's palace, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. 9 This girl pleased him, and she won his favor. He hurried to provide her with her cosmetics and delicacies, and to give her the seven most suitable maids from the king's palace. He moved her, along with her girls, to the best part of the harem.

10 Esther did not divulge her nationality or her lineage, for

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ness and competence as a legal decisor, as humility broadened his intellectual horizons and brought him closer to G–d, the author of the Torah.

(Based on *Ma'amar, Shushan Purim* 5734)

הֲדַסָּה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר — *Hadassah—that is, Esther.*

Living in a world that is often hostile to the values and observance of Judaism, there is always the temptation to compromise. Do we really have the energy and resilience required to persistently be different from our neighbors and to stand out from the crowd?

Or, to frame the question in more metaphysical terms: Doesn't living in the world of *matter* cause an inevitable drain on our *spirit?* Would it not be fair to say that bodily incarnation must restrain and compromise, to some extent, the vibrancy of our souls?

The Kabbalists taught that the answer to this question is: Yes and no. Superficially, of course, yes; but, in essence, if we listen to the deeper voices of our hearts, no.

And that is what this verse comes to teach us. "Hadassah" ("the righteous") hints to the pre-natal, disembodied soul which is in direct communion with G–d. "Esther," a name symbolizing concealment and secularity (see ***Talmud***) represents our bodily incarnation that serves as a distraction to everything spiritual. Surely, now the soul is hampered by the body, things cannot be the same any longer? Won't our connection with G–d hopelessly lose its focus?

Says the Megillah: "Hadassah *is* Esther." There need be no real compromise, because an inner link of soul consciousness is always retained. It just requires some more effort and introspection to penetrate the

כִּי מָרְדְּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד: יא וּבְכָל־יוֹם
וָיוֹם מָרְדְּכַי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֲצַר בֵּית־הַנָּשִׁים לָדַעַת
אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וּמַה־יֵּעָשֶׂה בָּהּ: יב וּבְהַגִּיעַ תֹּר
נַעֲרָה וְנַעֲרָה לָבוֹא | אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ מִקֵּץ הֱיוֹת
לָהּ כְּדָת הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ כִּי כֵן יִמְלְאוּ יְמֵי
מְרוּקֵיהֶן שִׁשָּׁה חֳדָשִׁים בְּשֶׁמֶן הַמֹּר וְשִׁשָּׁה חֳדָשִׁים
בַּבְּשָׂמִים וּבְתַמְרוּקֵי הַנָּשִׁים: יג וּבְזֹאת הַנַּעֲרָה בָּאָה אֶל־
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר יִנָּתֶן לָהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּהּ מִבֵּית
הַנָּשִׁים עַד־בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ: יד בָּעֶרֶב | הִיא בָאָה וּבַבֹּקֶר
הִיא שָׁבָה אֶל־בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים שֵׁנִי אֶל־יַד שַׁעַשְׁגַּז סְרִיס
הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַפִּילַגְשִׁים לֹא־תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי
אִם־חָפַץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרְאָה בְשֵׁם: טו וּבְהַגִּיעַ תֹּר־
אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־אֲבִיחַיִל דֹּד מָרְדְּכַי אֲשֶׁר לָקַח־לוֹ לְבַת
לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא בִקְּשָׁה דָּבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר
יֹאמַר הֵגַי סְרִיס־הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים וַתְּהִי אֶסְתֵּר

TORAS MENACHEM

"white noise" of your predominately physical life *but your soul never loses its connection with G–d.*

Our verse, then, is a kind of spiritual introduction to the story that follows. How did the Jews manage to withstand the formidable challenge that stood ahead of them, a year-long test of faith for which they imagined they would lose their lives?

The answer: "Hadassah is Esther." Their souls provided them with such a powerful level of connectedness that they were able to withstand even the harshest of challenges.

(Based on *Ma'amar* of Purim 5719, 5713)

וּבְהַגִּיעַ תֹּר אֶסְתֵּר ... לֹא בִקְּשָׁה דָּבָר — *When the turn of Esther came... she requested nothing.*

In Kabbalistic metaphor, Esther's ascent to the palace represents the soul's ascent to G–d. The soul normally requires assistance in its journey upwards, which is provided by angels, *"The angel of G–d encamps around those that fear Him, and delivers them"* (Psalms 34:8; see *Bava Metzia* 85b).

But that is only if the soul serves G–d with its *own* powers of love, fear, or will. When the time comes for ascent—such as the start of a new day—the soul

Mordechai had instructed her not to tell. **11** Each and every day, Mordechai would walk about in front of the harem's courtyard, to learn how Esther was managing and what was going to happen to her.

12 When each girl's turn arrived to go to King Ahasuerus, at the end of the requisite twelve months prescribed for the women (for that is how long their cosmetic treatment lasted —six months with myrrh oil, and six months with perfumes, and with other women's cosmetics), **13** then the girl would come to the king with this privilege: whatever she would request to come with her from the harem to the king's palace would be given to her. **14** She would go in the evening, and she would return in the morning to the second harem, under the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, keeper of the concubines. She would then no longer come to the king unless the king wanted her, when she would be summoned by name.

Esther is Chosen as Queen

15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail—uncle of Mordechai, who had taken her for a daughter—came to go in to the king, she requested nothing, except what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, suggested. Yet Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her.

TORAS MENACHEM

realizes that its powers are simply insufficient to pull it closer to G–d.

But, "*when the turn of Esther came ... she requested nothing.*" If the soul *surrenders* itself before G–d, it "requests nothing," it can come close without the assistance of an angel. When we surrender ourselves to G–d, we make ourselves into the greatest possible receptacle for His light and blessings by removing the obstacle of the ego.

And then the soul will have *"found favor in the eyes of all who saw her."*

(Based on First *Ma'amar* of Purim 5717)

נֹשֵׂאת חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָּל־רֹאֶיהָ: טז וַתִּלָּקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ מַלְכוּתוֹ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי
הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ טֵבֵת בִּשְׁנַת־שְׁבַע לְמַלְכוּתוֹ: יז וַיֶּאֱהַב
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל־הַנָּשִׁים וַתִּשָּׂא־חֵן וָחֶסֶד
לְפָנָיו מִכָּל־הַבְּתוּלוֹת וַיָּשֶׂם כֶּתֶר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ
וַיַּמְלִיכֶהָ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי: יח וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתֶּה גָּדוֹל
לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וַעֲבָדָיו אֵת מִשְׁתֵּה אֶסְתֵּר וַהֲנָחָה לַמְּדִינוֹת
עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן מַשְׂאֵת כְּיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ: יט וּבְהִקָּבֵץ בְּתוּלוֹת
שֵׁנִית וּמָרְדֳּכַי יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ: כ אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מַגֶּדֶת
מֽוֹלַדְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מָרְדֳּכָי וְאֶת־
מַאֲמַר מָרְדֳּכַי אֶסְתֵּר עֹשָׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה בְאָמְנָה

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **Why were more girls offered to the king after Esther had already been chosen? (v. 19)**

Ralbag: Ahasuerus was very fond of Esther, but he still wondered if he might find someone better.

Megilas Setarim: Since Esther refused to divulge her lineage, Ahasuerus did not wish to have a child with her for fear that she was from undesirable stock. Therefore, he sought another wife.

Me'am Lo'ez: This second search was Mordechai's suggestion. He wanted to determine if it was really G–d's plan that Esther should be married to the king.

● **Why was Mordechai "sitting at the king's gate"? (v. 19)**

Ralbag: He was one of the king's judicial advisors.

Yalkut Shimoni: He was promoted to a position of high office, at Esther's recommendation (par. 1053).

TORAS MENACHEM

וּמָרְדֳּכַי יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ — *Mordechai was sitting at the king's gate.*

This verse suggests a strong proactiveness on Mordechai's part, that he was highly conscious of his influential position and was poised to utilize it to the utmost. Mordechai sat at the king's gate continuously, tenaciously and effectively, because the hand of Providence had signalled him that this was his calling. Here was a Jew, exiled from Jerusalem to a foreign land, and yet in the course of just a few years, he found himself in a position of influence over a far-reaching empire spanning one-hundred and twenty seven provinces!

The Megillah is teaching us that if Divine providence grants you some measure of influence over a community, town, city, state or country, you must sense it as a calling from Above, responding with boldness and certainty in every effort to promote the values of Judaism. There is no room for doubt or speculation: G–d is speaking to you personally through providence.

(Based on *Sichah* of Purim 5744)

16 Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, to his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month of Teves, in the seventh year of his reign. **17** The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the girls. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

18 The king threw a great banquet for all his ministers and servants—the feast of Esther. He waived the provincial taxes and bestowed gifts, according to the king's means.

19 When girls were gathered a second time, Mordechai was sitting at the king's gate. **20** Esther would still not tell her lineage or her nationality, as Mordechai had instructed her. For Esther observed Mordechai's orders as she had done while under his care.

TORAS MENACHEM

וְאֶת מַאֲמַר מָרְדְּכַי אֶסְתֵּר עֹשָׂה — *Esther observed Mordechai's orders.*

In virtually every instance in the Megillah, Esther appears to be merely following the instructions of Mordechai. Most notably, at the crucial junction in the story when Esther resists beseeching the king to annul the decree against the Jews, out of fear that she will be killed for an unannounced visit, it is Mordechai's words that convince her otherwise (below 4:13-14). Why then is this text known as "Megillas Esther," if it is Mordechai's prudent judgment that was, ultimately, the cause of salvation?

At the literal level, one could simply argue that Esther risked her life to save the Jewish people, whereas Mordechai did not, so she remains the heroine here. Also, the *Talmud* relates that it was Esther, and not Mordechai, who persistently pleaded with the Sages for the Megillah to be included in the Biblical canon (*Megillah* 7a), which explains why the text is named in her honor—rather like the Torah which is named after Moshe, since he "gave his soul for it" (*Exodus Rabah* 30:4).

But while both these reasons are satisfying, they fail to explain why Mordechai's name was excluded altogether from the title of the Megillah. Considering his extremely central role, would it not have been more fair to name this text the "Megillah of Esther and Mordechai"? (or "Mordechai and Esther"?)

Apparently, the intended message here is that Mordechai and Esther were *not* on an equal footing. Rather, *Esther's virtues significantly surpassed Mordechai's, to the extent that the Megillah is named after her, and not him.*

How does all of this square with our verse, and other such instances, which point to the subservience of Esther to her cousin and his seniority in all decision making?

The answer is that Mordechai's instructions to Esther acted as a kind of catalyst or stimulus that brought to light her true virtues and qualities, *and once those qualities were revealed she greatly surpassed him.*

Thus it was Esther's insight, and not Mordechai's, to gather all the Jews and fast for three days (4:15-16), before she would approach the king. And when

אִתּוֹ: ס כא בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וּמָרְדְּכַי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ
קָצַף בִּגְתָן וָתֶרֶשׁ שְׁנֵי־סָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשֹּׁמְרֵי הַסַּף
וַיְבַקְשׁוּ לִשְׁלֹחַ יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ: כב וַיִּוָּדַע הַדָּבָר
לְמָרְדְּכַי וַיַּגֶּד לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לַמֶּלֶךְ
בְּשֵׁם מָרְדְּכָי: כג וַיְבֻקַּשׁ הַדָּבָר וַיִּמָּצֵא וַיִּתָּלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם
עַל־עֵץ וַיִּכָּתֵב בְּסֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: ס

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **What principle do we learn from Esther's actions? (v. 22)**

Mishnah: Any person who repeats something in the name of its original source brings redemption to the world, as the verse states *"and Esther told it to the king in Mordechai's name"* (*Avos* 6:6).

Machzor Vitri: Since Ahasuerus was aware that Mordechai was responsible for saving his life, he subsequently rewarded Mordechai for this, which contributed to Haman's downfall. Esther's care here to credit Mordechai with the deed was the ultimate cause of a chain of events that led to the redemption (*Avos* ibid.).

TORAS MENACHEM

Mordechai objected, on the grounds that one of the three days was the festival of Passover when fasting is forbidden, it was Esther who convinced him, arguing: *"Great sage of Israel! For whom is the Passover?"* (*Esther Rabah* 8:7); *"If we will be destroyed, G–d forbid, then there will be no Passover. Better we should desecrate one Passover so that we will be able to fulfill many"* (*Eitz Yosef ibid.*).

And, as mentioned above, it was *Esther's* persistence with the Sanhedrin that led the Megillah to be canonized as a Biblical text.

So while the Jewish people most definitely owe a very great debt to Mordechai *ha-Yehudi*, his role was very much one of bringing to light Esther's intrinsic virtues which, once disclosed, outshone his own contribution to the story. The Megillah, therefore, bears Esther's name exclusively.

(Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Tzav* 5744)

Attempted Assassination of the King

21 In those days, when Mordechai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains—entrance guards—became angry and plotted to lay a hand on King Ahasuerus. **22** And the matter became known to Mordechai. He told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told it to the king in Mordechai's name.

23 When the matter was investigated and verified, they were both hanged on a gallows. It was recorded in the Book of Chronicles, before the king.

Toras Menachem

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לַמֶּלֶךְ בִּשֵׁם מָרְדְּכָי — *And Esther told it to the king in Mordechai's name.*

There were two pressing reasons why Esther might have wanted to conceal her source of information in this instance. 1) Hearing a conspiracy theory proposed by a Jew was likely to have angered the king, possibly resulting in a punishment for Mordechai even before the theory could be verified. 2) Esther's intimating that she was acting on Mordechai's instructions could easily have been construed as a disloyalty to the king.

Notwithstanding these arguments to the contrary, *"Esther told it to the king in Mordechai's name,"* and her attribution contributed to the Purim miracle. So from here the Sages derived, *"Any person who repeats something in the name of its original source brings redemption to the world"* (*Avos* 6:6).

(Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Balak* 5747)