

Chapter 5

ביום השביעי בטוב לב המלך ביין אמר למהומן בנותא הרבונא בגתא ואבגתא ותר וכרכס שבעת הסריסים המשרתים את פני המלך אחשוורוש. להביא את ושתי המלכה לפני המלך בכתר מלכות להראות העמים והשרים את יפיה כי טובת מראה היא. ותמאן המלכה ושתי לבוא בדבר המלך אשר ביד הסריסים ויקצף המלך מאד וחמתו בערה בו.

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he told Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas, the seven chamberlains who attended King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king [adorned] with the royal crown, to show off to the people and the officials her beauty, for she was beautiful of appearance. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command [conveyed] by the hand of the chamberlains; the king therefore became very enraged and his wrath burned in him (1:10-12).

§1 ביום השביעי בטוב לב המלך ביין וגו' — ON THE SEVENTH DAY, WHEN THE HEART OF THE KING WAS MERRY WITH WINE, ETC.]

The Midrash presents a lengthy exposition of a passage in *Proverbs*, linking it finally to the inebriation of Ahasuerus at the royal banquet, and its disastrous results.^[1] This exposition constitutes a veritable polemic against wine, and describes the many ills and dangers inherent in the drinking of wine in excess, illustrating how wine has brought about the ruination of individuals and nations:

R' Azaryah opened his discourse on our passage with a quote from *Proverbs* (23:31): "אל תרא יין כי יתאדם כי יתן — בבוס עינו יתהלך במישרים" — *Do not look at wine becoming red, for one who does so will fix his eyes on the goblet, he will walk in straight paths.* — R' Azaryah said: "אל תרא יין כי יתאדם" — *Do not look at wine becoming red*^[2] means: Do not look upon wine and drink it in excess, for [one who does so] will perhaps have a desire for a woman even if she is unclean as the result of the blood^[3] of menstruation and the blood of zivah.^[4]

The rest of the verse is interpreted in a similar vein: "כי יתן בבוס עינו" — The verse continues, *For one* who does so *will fix his eyes on the goblet.* — The word that is read [קרי] as [בבוס], meaning *on the goblet*, is actually written (בתיב) in the text as בביס, "on the pouch," which is a euphemism for the female anatomy,^[5] "ביס אחד יהיה לבלגנו" — as it is stated, *there will be one pouch for all of us* (ibid. 1:14).^[6] "יתהלך במישרים" — The verse continues, *He will walk in straight paths.*^[7] — This means that *eventually his wife will tell him*, "I have seen a spot of discharge like a red rose,"^[8] — *and yet he will not separate from her.*^[9] — R' Assi said: "אמר רבי אסי" — *Moreover, if [the drinker] is a Torah scholar, he will end up pronouncing impure that which is pure, and pronouncing pure that which is impure.*^[10]

NOTES

1. A majority of the forthcoming section, with some minor variations, is found in *Vayikra Rabbah* 12 §1, where the commentators discuss it. The citation of the commentators to *Vayikra Rabbah* in the notes that follow refer to their remarks on that passage.

2. According to the plain meaning, this verse is cautioning a person not to be seduced by the rich and alluring appearance of red wine, because of the many detriments posed by the immoderate consumption of wine, which that passage proceeds to enumerate. There are a number of difficulties with the simple approach, however. Wine has several characteristics that make it appealing: taste, color, the warm effect that it creates, and the fact that it rejoices the spirit. Why then does this verse single out the redness of the wine? Moreover, the word יתאדם actually means "becoming red." But the wine is red at the outset, and as such the text should have stated more accurately אדם אדם, "when it is red." And finally, why should Scripture speak out specifically against red wine, when white wine is equally dangerous? The Midrash therefore provides a homiletical approach, which reinterprets the phrase יתאדם not as a factor that strengthens one's craving for wine, but rather as a consequence (in addition to the other consequences listed in that passage) of one who drinks excessively (see *Yefeh Anaf; Maharzu to Vayikra Rabbah* s.v. ידאי, *Yedei Moshe*, and commentary of R' M.A. Mirkin to *Vayikra Rabbah*).

3. The word יתאדם is interpreted homiletically as an amalgamation of the words יתאדם דם ("he will crave blood").

4. A post-menstrual discharge of blood. The distinction between "menstrual" and "post-menstrual" discharges of blood is a complex topic (see *Niddah* 72b-73a; *Rashi to Leviticus* 15:25; and *Rambam, Hil. Isurei Bi'ah* 6:1-6, for details), but for our purposes it is sufficient to bear in mind that the Torah prohibits relations with a woman while she is in the state of impurity (*tumah*) brought about by either type of discharge. Any Torah-observing Jew would recoil at the thought of transgressing this prohibition; however, under the influence of alcohol he may engage in relations with her despite her impurity. The verse thus cautions against the immoderate use of wine, for it leads to immorality (*Yefeh Anaf; Eitz Yosef*).

5. The Midrash is explaining the verse as cautioning a person against gazing longingly upon wine, for doing so may lead a person down a path in which he may fixate upon immoral matters, and come to engage in promiscuous behavior.

6. That verse's first phrase reads, *Cast your lot among us*. The entire passage speaks of a group of bandits attempting to convince a young man to be their partner in crime, and this particular verse describes the gang's proposal for the division of loot. The difficulty with this literal interpretation is that the verse's first clause implies that the stolen goods will be divided by lot, whereas according to the second clause, the loot will be the common property of the entire gang, to be distributed equally. Therefore the Midrash interprets the second phrase euphemistically, as referring to promiscuous behavior (see further, *Yefeh Anaf; Maharzu to Vayikra Rabbah; Eitz Yosef*).

7. The difficulty here is that the drunkard does not walk in straight paths at all, either figuratively or literally.

8. And I have thereby become forbidden to you until my purification. [The "red rose" expression is often used in the Midrash as a metaphor for menstruation. Perhaps this is because of the application of this expression to *Song of Songs* 7:3 (see *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* ad loc.), where the verse explicitly refers to roses.]

9. Had he been sober he would have had the self-control to desist from sinning. But the drunkard, who is convinced that he "walks in straight paths," yields to his base desires (see *Yefeh Anaf; Eitz Yosef*).

[Although the Midrash has already stated that drinking leads to promiscuity, the Midrash here adds that even in this case, where the temptation to sin is not that great, for the wife will eventually become permitted to her husband, nonetheless wine will entice the husband, and he will be unable to abstain during the period of impurity (*Yefeh Anaf*).]

10. Wine has the capacity to destroy one's mental faculties. For the drunkard "walks in straight paths" in the sense that according to his distorted thinking, he regards all his mistaken and illogical rulings as correct (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*). Alternatively, R' Assi is addressing a later verse (v. 33) in the "wine" passage in *Proverbs*: "ולקח ידבר תהפכות: *Radal to Vayikra Rabbah*). Alternatively, R' Assi is providing the reason why the Torah prohibits a person who has imbibed wine to render a legal decision (see *Leviticus* 10:8-11 and *Kereisos* 13b). Such activity requires clear thought; a mind beclouded by drink cannot exercise proper legal judgment, and will hand down convoluted rulings (see *Matnos Kehunah to Vayikra Rabbah*). According to all the interpretations, the Midrash is making the point that under the

The Midrash presents another exposition on the *Proverbs* verse: "אֵל תִּרְאֵ יַיִן כִּי יִתְאָדָם" — דָּבָר אַחֵר, "אל תרא יין כי יתאדם" — Another interpretation of *Do not look at wine becoming red*: "וְדַאי מִסְמִיךְ לִיָּהּ" — [The wine] literally makes [him who drinks it] red.^[11] "כִּי יִתֵּן בְּבוֹס עֵינָיו" — For one who does so will fix his eye on the goblet — הוא — the word בבוס is written בפניס ("on the pouch"), but pronounced בבוס (*on the goblet*), indicating that he (the drinker) fixes his eyes upon the goblet, while the shopkeeper fixes his eyes upon the customer's purse, anticipating that the drinker will empty it to purchase drink.^[12] "וְיִתְהַלֵּךְ" — And the verse concludes, *he will walk in straight* (or *level*) paths, — סוּף עֵבִיד בִּיתְיָהּ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל — meaning that eventually he will make his house "level."^[13] אָמַר: מִה דְהָרִין קִיתוּנָא דְנַחֲשָׂא — He says, for instance, "What this brass cup does, an earthenware cup can do," — וּמְנַבֵּין לִיָּהּ וְשִׁתֵּי חֲמָרָא — and he sells [the brass cup] and drinks its value in wine.^[14] — And he says, "What this brass pot does an earthenware pot can do," — וּמְנַבֵּין לִיָּהּ וְשִׁתֵּי חֲמָרָא בְטִימִיתָהּ — and he sells [the brass pot] and drinks its value in wine. — רַבִּי יִצְחָק בַּר רִדִּיפָה אָמַר בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי אַמִּי — R' Yitzchak bar Redifah said in the name of R' Ami: סוּף שְׂמוּבָר — Eventually he sells all his household utensils^[15] and drinks wine with the money he gets for them.

The Midrash relates a story illustrating this principle: R' Acha said: — אָמַר רַבִּי אַחָא מַעֲשֶׂה בְּאָדָם אֶחָד שֶׁהָיָה מוֹכֵר כֶּל — There was an incident involving a certain man who was selling all his household utensils and drinking wine with the money he received for them. אָמְרֵי — His sons said, "If this continues, this father of ours will leave behind nothing for us to inherit." — בְּנוֹי: לִית הָרִין אַבּוּנָן שְׁבִיק לָן כְּלוּם — What did they do? — מַה עָשׂוּ אֲשֶׁקוּנִיָּה וְשִׁבְרִנִּיָּה וְטַעֲנוּנִיָּה וְיִתְבּוּנִיָּה — They gave him wine to drink and made him drunk, and then they carried him and placed him in a certain burial cave.^[16] — עֵבְרִין שְׂפָאִין בְּתַרְעֵי בֵית עֲלָמָא — Later, some wine merchants were passing by the entrance of the burial cave, — וְשִׁמְעוּן אַנְגְּרִיאַא בְּמַדִּינְתָּא — when they heard that there was a levy^[17] taking place in the city. — עֲלָמָא הָיָה פְּרָקוּן טוֹעֵנְהוּן בְּגוּ בֵית — They unloaded their cargo in that burial cave,^[18]

in which (unbeknownst to them) the drunken man happened to be, — אָמְרִין: יִגְזַל וְיִחַמְמֵי מִה קְלָא בְּמַדִּינְתָּא — saying, "Let us go and see what is the uproar in the city." — אִיתְעַר הָהוּא סְבָא מִשִּׁנְתָּהּ — Meanwhile that old man awoke from his sleep — חָמָא זִיקָא — and saw a wineskin placed above his head. — שָׂרָא יִתִּיה וְיִתְבִּיָּה בְּפּוּמִיָּה וְשִׁתֵּי — He untied it, put it in his mouth, and drank. — שְׁתֵּי עַד דְנָגִים שִׁנְתִּיה — He went on drinking until he fell asleep. — לְכַתֵּר תְּלַתָּא יוּמִין אָמְרִין בְּנֵיה — After three days had passed since the father was placed in the graveyard, his sons said one to another, — לִית אַנְן אֶזְלִינָן וְחִינָן — "Should we not go out and see how that father of ours is faring?" — אֶזְלוּן וְאִשְׁבְּחוּנִיָּה וְהָא זִיקָא זָהִיב בְּפּוּמִיָּה — They went out and found him, and there was the wine-skin placed in his mouth! — אָמְרֵי: אַף הָכָא לֹא שְׁבִיק לָךְ בְּרִינִךְ — In exasperation, they said to him, "Even here your Creator did not forsake you! — הוֹאִיל וְהוּא לָךְ מִן שְׁמַיָּא — Now, since [wine] is provided for you even from Heaven,^[19] לִית אַנְן יִדְעִין מַה נַּעֲבֵד — we do not know what we should do with you!" — לָךְ עֵבְרִי — So they made a rotating arrangement for him among themselves, — כֹּל חַד וְחַד הָיָה מִשְׁקָה לִיָּהּ יוּמָא — and each one of them would provide drink for him for one day.^[20]

The Midrash now returns to its exposition of the passage in *Proverbs* *ibid.*, and explains the Scriptural similes illustrating the consequences of overindulging in wine:

It is written: *And you will be like one who lies down in the heart of the sea, and like one who lies on the top of a chibeil*^[21] (*Proverbs* 23:34). The verse's first phrase means that the drunkard's unsteady gait resembles the swaying movement of a boat that "lies" in the middle of the sea.^[22] "וְיִכְשָׁב" — The verse's second phrase, *And like one who lies on the top of a chibeil* [חִבֵּיל] — means that the drunkard is like a rooster that perches on top of a rope [חִבֵּיל] — אָזִיל וְאָתִי אָזִיל וְאָתִי — who goes back and forth, again and again. — אָזִיל קְבִרְנִישָׂא דְיִתִּיב בְּרִישׁ תּוֹרָנָא אָזִיל — Alternatively, he will be like a helmsman sitting high above on the masthead,^[23] who sways repeatedly to and fro.^[24]

NOTES

influence of wine the drinker will not only sin personally (see above), but will even cause others to sin (*Umrei Yosher to Vayikra Rabbah*).

11. The Midrash refers to the ruddy complexion of the inebriated. The verse, then, is counseling a person: Do not gaze upon wine longingly (אל תרא יין), thinking that you can drink wine to excess without anyone the wiser, for your reddish appearance (כי יתאדם) will give you away and you will be unable to conceal your drinking (see *Matnos Kehunah to Vayikra Rabbah; Yefeh Anaf; Eitz Yosef*).

12. The wine merchants, aware that the drinker does not operate with judicious financial restraint, push their wares, so as to increase their profits. [The Midrash below makes the point that they even resort to dishonest means to separate the drinker from his money. See below, notes 26, 27.] Eventually, the drinker will continue drinking until his purse is empty. (See *Yefeh Anaf; Eitz Yosef*.)

13. By emptying out its contents to pay for his drinking habit, as the Midrash goes on to describe.

14. I.e., he uses some of the proceeds from his expensive brass cup to buy a cheap earthenware one, and spends the remainder to fund his addiction.

15. In his pursuit of wine he will eventually rationalize even the sale of his earthenware utensils and everything else in his household (*Yefeh Anaf; Radal to Vayikra Rabbah; Eitz Yosef*).

16. They anticipated that upon awakening he would be so frightened by his surroundings that he would give up drinking (*Eitz Yosef*). Alternatively, this was a plot to kill him. Their plan was that when he would awaken and realize that he was in a graveyard, he would die of shock (*Peirush Kadum to Vayikra Rabbah; see Matnos Kehunah ad loc.*).

17. When the government impounds people's personal property for military or other service.

18. In this particular case horses and donkeys were being impounded, so the wine merchants unloaded their donkeys and hid them, so as to evade this conscription (*Peirush Kadum to Vayikra Rabbah; Maarich, cited in Eitz Yosef*).

19. I.e., since it is evidently God's will that your craving for wine be satisfied.

20. The incident's ironic conclusion yielded the result that the father's addiction to wine succeeded not only in exhausting his own wealth, but in imposing an ongoing financial burden upon his sons, who had to finance his alcoholic dependency (*HaTirosh to Vayikra Rabbah*).

21. The word חִבֵּיל occurs nowhere else in Scripture; the Midrash therefore goes on to elaborate on its meaning.

22. This simile describes the unsteadiness and lack of physical coordination of the drunkard. The parallel passage in *Vayikra Rabbah* has דִּמְסָרְפָּא, "that is tossed about"; the Midrash speaks of the violent pitching and tossings of a boat being buffeted about by the waves in a storm at sea.

23. The Midrash now interprets חִבֵּיל to mean "mast of a ship" (see commentators on *Proverbs* ad loc.) just as a sailor is called חִבֵּיל [both words probably related to חִבֵּל, rope, a reference to the sails' ropes, which are tied to the mast and controlled by the sailors] (see *Jonah* 1:6 and *Ezekiel* 27:8 with commentaries).

24. [*Yefeh Anaf* explains that each of the Midrash's three similes focuses on a different aspect of the hazards of drunkenness. The first description

The Midrash now explains the next verse in the passage from *Proverbs*:
 "הבוני בל תליתו" – The passage continues, citing the drunkard

himself, speaking in the first person, *They struck me, but I did not become ill* (ibid., v. 35). מִדּוּחַ לִיָּה וְלֹא מִרְגִישׁ – This means that **they strike him and he does not feel it.**^[25]

 NOTES

(that of the ship being tossed about in the sea) speaks of the real dangers to which the drunkard exposes himself – tripping, falling into a pit, etc. – as he staggers along. The second (that of the rooster bobbing up and down on the rope) relates not to the danger to life and limb (as the previous case), but to the physical discomfort of the drunkard. And the

third scenario compares the mental disorientation of the drunkard to the vertigo that the lookout on the top of the ship may experience in choppy waters.]

25. I.e., due to the desensitizing quality of wine, the drunkard does not feel the pain of blows inflicted upon him.

“הִלְמוּנִי בַל יִדְעוּ” — *They beat me, but I was unaware* (ibid.).
 טִלְמוֹן לִיה וְלֹא יָדַע — This means that they assault him without
 him knowing it. שְׁתֵּי שִׁבְרֵי הַמֶּשָׂא קִיסְטִין — For example,^[26] he
 drinks five *kistas* of wine, אֲמָרִין לִיה עֲשֶׂה קִיסְטִין אִישׁוּתִית — but
 [the tavern keepers] tell him, “You have drunk ten *kistas*.”^[27]
 וְאִם תֹּאמַר דְּמִיחָעַר הוּא מְשִׁיחָתִיה וְאֵשֶׁר לִיה — And if you should say
 that when he awakens from his drunken stupor he will for-
 get about [drinking ever again], מְתִי אֶקִיץ אוֹסִיף —
 [Scripture] states quite to the contrary: *When I
 will awake, I will continue asking for more* (ibid.).^[28]

The Midrash returns to the “wine” passage in *Proverbs* and
 explains its opening verse:^[29]

“לִמְנוּ אוֹי לִמְנוּ אוֹי” — It is written, *Who cries, “Alas!”? Who cries,*

“Woe!”? (ibid., v. 29). רַב הוּנָא אָמַר — Rav Huna says in re-
 sponse to Scripture’s questions: לִמְנוּ שְׂאִינוּ עִמְלָה בְּתוֹרָה — *One
 who does not toil in the study of Torah.*^[30]

The Midrash continues to explain the meaning of the following
 words in the *Proverbs* passage:

“לִמְנוּ מִדְּיָנִים” — The verse (ibid.) continues: *Who is con-
 tentious?* This means, “To whom are judgments meted out?”^[31]
 “לִמְנוּ שִׁיחַ” — *Who has prattle* (lit., *conversation*)? This
 means, “Who engages in chatter?”^[32] “לִמְנוּ פְּעֻעִים חָנָם” —
 “Who is wounded for naught?” This means, “To whom
 are unwarranted injuries?”^[33] “לִמְנוּ חָרִים עַל הַיַּיִן” — The verse
 provides the answers for all these questions by identifying this
 hapless “who”: *Those who linger over wine* (ibid., v. 30).

NOTES

26. The Midrash interprets the “beating” or “assault” of the verse to be
 referring to monetary exploitation rather than physical abuse; for if it
 were interpreted in this latter sense, the second clause of the verse would
 appear to be nothing more than a redundant reformulation of the first.
 Due to the diminished mental state of the drinker, it is easy to deceive
 him, as the Midrash proceeds to illustrate (*Yefeh Anaf*). [Alternatively,
 the Midrash gives this particular example of abuse because it homiletically
 interprets הִלְמוּנִי as an amalgam of הוֹל מוֹנֵי, “making a mockery of
 someone’s account” (*Radal*).]

27. The tavern keepers, eager to victimize the drinkers and profit from
 them (see note 12 above), overstate the number of refills they have
 provided (*Matnos Kehunah; Yedei Moshe*).

28. See insight A.

29. See *Yefeh Anaf* above (s.v. כתיב) and *Eitz Yosef* for a discussion of
 why the Midrash only now interprets the beginning of the passage from
Proverbs, and does not interpret the verses in their consecutive order.
 Among the points made there is that the Midrash rearranged the pas-
 sage in *Proverbs* so that it would be able to conclude its presentation
 with the exposition of v. 32 there, which pertains to our passage in *Esther*
 and the subject matter at hand, i.e., the drunkenness of Ahasuerus, and
 the tragedy that it precipitated.

30. See Insight B. It is somewhat perplexing that Rav Huna felt the need
 to “answer” these questions, since Scripture itself provides an answer in

the very next verse (*Those who linger over wine, etc.*)! *Matnos Kehunah* (in
Vayikra Rabbah) explains that Rav Huna was not actually interpreting
 this verse, but rather borrowing its language for an aphorism that he was
 wont to say. He was in the habit of quoting these Scriptural questions,
 and, out of context, supplying his own answer. [Alternatively, Rav Huna
 opines that the phrase לִמְנוּ שִׁיחַ later in the verse — which, in the plain
 interpretation of the verse, is an additional question, *Who has prattle?* (see
 below) — should be rendered homiletically as an answer to the preceding
 questions. Understood thus, the verse reads: *Who cries, “Alas!”? Who cries,
 “Woe!”? . . . One who engages in idle chatter, i.e., and does not involve him-
 self in the study of Torah* (*Radal ad loc.*). See also *Yefeh Anaf*. According
 to Rav Huna, then, the sense of this phrase is that one of the great perils
 of wine drinking is that one who devotes his attention to it will become
 remiss in his obligation to involve himself in Torah study.]

31. According to its literal sense, this verse means that the heavy drinker,
 due to his increased irritability and argumentativeness, will constantly
 find himself involved in drunken squabbles. The Midrash adds
 that the word מִדְּיָנִים is related to the word דְּיָנִים, *judgments*, implying that
 wine skews one’s moral compass (see above), and that one will be held
 accountable for the iniquities committed while in his cups (*Yefeh Anaf*).

32. *Yefeh Anaf*. Alternatively: “Who will become the topic of conversation
 among gossips in town?” (ibid.).

33. Here the Midrash merely clarifies the meaning of the Hebrew phrase
 by translating it into Aramaic.

INSIGHTS

A The Imagined Virtues of Drink The verse describes the plight of a
 drunkard. He is beaten and swindled, but cannot refrain from drinking.
 All sorts of misfortunes befall him while drunk; yet, no sooner does he
 return to sobriety than he is again abroad in search of wine.

The *Gra* (*Proverbs* 23:35) expands upon this. He explains that not
 only is the drunkard incapable of recognizing the pitfalls of drink, he
 actually imagines its evils to be its virtues. *Gra* illustrates with an inci-
 dent cited in *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Shemini* §11) regarding a man who
 was overly enamored of wine, whose frequent inebriation made him
 the despair of his family. It happened once that his son came across a
 drunkard lying in the mud. Passersby mocked him. Youths pelted him
 with stones. The son brought his father to witness the scene, hoping
 that the man’s humiliation would serve as an object lesson to his father.
 The father failed to take the lesson. To the contrary, he even asked the
 drunkard where he had obtained such potent wine. The son turned
 to him in disbelief. The father exclaimed, “My son, this is my sole plea-
 sure! It is my paradise.”

The *Gra* explains that the father was so deeply in thrall to drink that
 he perceived the drunkard’s obliviousness to his situation not as a
 disadvantage but as a benefit. To him, the man’s ability to ignore the
 beating was evidence of the value of drinking and the excellence of
 the wine, for without the wine’s anesthetic properties, the fellow surely
 would have suffered great pain. From this incident we learn that a
 drunkard can become so degraded that he embraces even the pum-
 melings and cruelties suffered while drunk, for they demonstrate to
 him the benefits of drink; namely, one’s blissful unawareness of even
 the most profound suffering. The drunkard foolishly praises the ability
 of wine to ward off his pain; he does not realize that it is the wine itself
 that is the cause of his pain.

This backward reasoning is expressed in the verse, which records the

inebriate’s ode to the imagined virtues of drink: *They struck me, but I
 did not become ill; they beat me, but I was unaware.* He exults that even
 as he is hit, he feels no pain, for the wine numbs his senses; even as he
 is swindled, he remains untroubled, for the wine renders him careless
 of his possessions.

Thus, the verse serves as a warning: Let one not imagine that he
 will make a trial of inebriation, and if he finds it unpleasant will refrain
 thereafter, for he will be given no such choice. Once a person is en-
 meshed in the grip of drink, even humiliation and blows carry for him
 the scent of paradise.

B Who Cries, “Alas?” Who Cries, “Woe?” The Midrash here explains
 that the most tragic person is the one who does not toil in Torah.

As recounted in *Kumi Roni BaLailah* (pp. 174-175), *R’ Yisrael Salanter*
 entered a study hall in Kovno early one morning and beheld a yeshi-
 vah student sleeping on the floor. It was evident that the boy had been
 learning well into the early morning hours and had fallen asleep on
 the bench. He had then rolled off the bench onto the floor, where he
 remained, fast asleep. Some of the men who had come early to pray
 were heard remarking what a pitiful sight the boy made.

R’ Yisrael said to them, “On the contrary, it is you who are to be pitied
 for sleeping away the entire night! Don’t pity the boy. He is the hap-
 piest of all, for he has studied Torah and has really benefited from life!
 He is the one about whom the Sages say, ‘If you do so, you are happy
 and all is well with you’ (*Psalms* 128:2) — you are happy in this world, and
 all is well with you in the World to Come” (*Avos* 6:4).

Life presents many opportunities to serve God and be involved in
 His Torah. One who makes the most of these will one day look back
 and rejoice. He will have lived a full and happy life. *Who cries, “Alas?”
 Who cries, “Woe?”* It is the one who does not utilize his opportunities
 to toil in Torah.

The Midrash provides a real-life illustration:
 עובדא הנה בחד בר נש דהנה אליה למשתי תרי עשר קיסטין דחמר בכל יום
 – There was once an incident involving a certain person who
 was accustomed to drinking twelve *kistas* of wine every day.
 יומא חד אישתי חד עשר קיסטין
 – One day, he had drunk only
 eleven *kistas*. דמך ולא אתא שינתא
 – He lay down to sleep,
 but sleep eluded him. קם בחשוכא אול לבי קפילא
 – He got
 up in the dark and went to a tavern. אמר ליה: זבין לי חד
 – He said to [the tavern keeper],
 “Sell me a *kista* of
 wine.” [The tavern keeper] said to
 him, “I will not open the tavern door for you,
 דהיא חשיבא
 – [The tavern keeper] said to
 him, “I will not open the tavern door for you,
 for it is dark outside, and I am afraid of the
 watchmen.”^[34] תלא עינייה וחנא נוקבא בתרעא
 – [The drinker]
 raised his eyes and saw a hole in the door. אמר ליה: הב לי
 – He said,
 “Give me some [wine] through
 this hole. אתה מפניו מלגיו ונאנא שתי מלבר
 – You pour out from
 inside the hole, and I will drink from outside.” עבר ליה
 – He did so for him. אישתי ודמך קדם תרעא
 – He drank the
 wine and fell asleep in front of the door. עברו עליה נטוריא
 – The watchmen passed by him, and, think-
 ing that he was a thief, מחוניה ופדעוניה
 – they beat him and
 wounded him. וקרו עליה “למי פצעים חנם”
 – And [people] applied
 to him the verse, *Who is wounded for naught?*
 למאן
 – and its Aramaic translation, “To whom are unwar-
 ranted injuries?”

The Midrash continues its exposition of the passage in *Proverbs* (ibid., v. 29):

למאן “למי חבללות עינים?”
 – *To whom is redness of the eyes?*
 This means: Whose eyes are sunlike in their red-
 ness?^[35] כל אלה למי
 – To whom are all these misfortunes of
 which the passage in *Proverbs* speaks?
 – למאן ארים על היין?
 – The very next verse responds: *To those who linger over wine* (ibid., v. 30). זה שנבנס לבי קפילא קדמאי ונפק בתראי
 – This is refer-
 ring to one who comes into the tavern first and leaves last.
 “לבאים לחקר ממסך”
 – The verse continues, *Those who come to
 inquire after mixed drinks* (ibid.). מן דשמע הן אית ליה חמרא
 – This refers to someone who, when he hears
 about a place where he can have fine wine, pursues it there.
 מה כתיב בו בסוף
 – What is written in regard to the ultimate

fate of [that person]? “אחריתו כנחש ישך וכצפעני ופרש” – *His end is like that of one bitten by a snake, like one “separated” by a serpent* (ibid., v. 32).
 – מה צפעון זה מפריש בין מיתה לחיים – This means: Just as the serpent separates between death and life,^[37] כך הפריש היין בין אדם לחנה – so wine caused a separation between Adam and Eve.^[38]
 דאמר רבי יהודה ברבי אלעאי
 – For R’ Yehudah the son of R’ Il’ai said: אותו העץ שאכל
 – The tree of which Adam the first man ate was a grapevine, from which wine is made.^[39]
 הדא הוא – Thus it is written, “ענבמו ענבי ראש אשקבלת מררת למו”
 – *their grapes are grapes of gall; clusters of bitterness were given to them* (*Deuteronomy* 32:32) – הללו הביאו מרורות לעולם – it was these grapes that introduced bitterness into the world.^[40]
 דבר אחר “ויבצפעני ופרש”
 – Another interpretation of *like one “separated” by a serpent*: מה צפעון זה מפריש בין מיתה לחיים – Just as the serpent separates between life and death, כך הפריש היין בין נח לבניו לעבודות – so wine caused a separation between Noah and his descendants^[41] in regard to slavery.
 הדא הוא דכתיב “וישפת מן היין וישקר ויתגל בתוך אהלה”
 – Thus it is written, *He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent* (*Genesis* 9:21), שמתוך כך
 – as a result of which [Noah] ultimately said, “Cursed is Canaan” (ibid., v. 25).^[42]
 דבר אחר, “ויבצפעני ופרש”
 – Another interpretation of *like one “separated” by a serpent*: מה צפעוני זה מפריש בין מיתה לחיים – Just as the serpent separates between life and death, כך הפריש היין בין לוט לבנותיו לממזרות – so wine caused a separation between Lot and his daughters with regard to illegitimacy.^[43]
 הדא הוא דכתיב “ותשקין את אביהן יין בלילה הוא”
 – Thus it is written, *So they plied their father with wine on that night* (ibid. 19:33), שמתוך כך
 – as a result of which, *Thus Lot’s two daughters conceived from their father* (ibid., v. 36).
 דבר אחר, “ויבצפעני ופרש”
 – Another interpretation of *like one “separated” by a serpent*: מה צפעוני זה מפריש בין מיתה לחיים – Just as the serpent separates between life and death, כך הפריש היין בין אהרן לבניו למיתה – so wine caused a “separation” between Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu through their death,

NOTES

34. That is: Since it is not customary for stores to be open so late, the watchmen will mistakenly assume that there is some sort of trouble here, and I am concerned about the consequences.

35. [See *Bava Basra* 84a, where the Gemara presents the idea that the sun is in fact red, as evidenced by its appearance during the morning and the evening, and it is only the sun’s intense brightness during the rest of the day that prevents us from seeing its true color.] The verse refers to the bloodshot eyes of the heavy drinker.

36. The Midrash will now suggest several interpretations of “separated,” a difficult word in this context.

37. The lethal bite of a serpent is called “separation” in that it causes the separation of man’s soul from his body, through death (*Yefeh Anaf*).

38. The wine that Adam drank from the Tree of Knowledge, as the Midrash proceeds to explain, drove a wedge between Adam and Eve, because Adam resented that Eve had persuaded him to partake of that wine. Alternatively, upon being banished from the Garden of Eden, Adam held himself aloof from Eve for a long period of time in penance for his sin (*Eruvin* 18b). The Midrash makes the point that this separation was brought about by wine (*Yefeh Anaf*).

39. Although Scripture does not identify the Tree of Knowledge from which Adam and Eve ate (see *Genesis* Ch. 3), the Sages did discuss its identity. R’ Yehudah identifies it with the grape.

40. The Midrash interprets this verse as referring to the bitterness of death. [Indeed, Scripture commonly uses the word *מר*, *bitter*, in conjunction with “death”; see, e.g., *I Samuel* 15:32, *Ecclesiastes* 7:26.] The simple meaning of that verse is that God is castigating either the Israelites or the nations of the world for their moral corruption, and Scripture, using agricultural metaphor, compares their sordid behavior and its ensuing consequences to poisonous and bitter fruits (see *Rashi* ad loc.). However, the wording, “clusters of bitterness” (as opposed to “bitter clusters”), lends itself to the homiletical explanation expressed by the Midrash, i.e., that grapes are the quintessential “bitter” fruit, for they brought about the ultimate bitterness.

41. I.e., Canaan and his progeny (*Yefeh Anaf*). See following note.

42. After the Flood, Noah planted a vineyard, drank of its wine, and became drunk. In his state of intoxication he became uncovered, and was humiliated by his son Ham, the father of Canaan. When Noah sobered and realized what had transpired, he cursed Canaan, saying that he (and his descendants) should be enslaved forever (see *Genesis* 9:20-27).

43. Lot bore legitimate children (i.e., not through an incestuous relationship) while his daughters bore illegitimate children (through an incestuous relationship). [The word *לממזרות* is not found in the earliest editions (it was added later based on *Os Emes* and *Matnos Kehunah*); see *Yefeh Anaf* for an alternate explanation of the “separation” of Lot from his daughters that is referred to here.]

רבי שמעון אמר — for it is taught in a Baraisa: R' Shimon said: — לא מתו בני אהרן אלא שנכנסו שתויי יין לאהל מועד — The sons of Aaron did not die but for the fact that they entered the Tent of Meeting intoxicated by wine.

The Midrash illustrates by means of a parable how it is that we know the sin for which the sons of Aaron were culpable:

R' Pinchas said in the name of R' Levi: — רבי פנחס בשם רבי לוי אמר — This can be compared to a king who had a trusted domestic. — מִשָּׁל לְמֶלֶךְ שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ בֵּן בַּיִת נֶאֱמָן — He once found him standing at the entrance of the house,^[44] — וְהָיָה אֵת רֵאשׁוֹ בְּשׁוּתִיקָה — and, without explanation,^[45] he decapitated him, — וּמִיָּנָה בֶּן בַּיִת אַחֵר תִּהְיֶה — and appointed another domestic in his stead. — וְאִין אָנוּ יוֹדְעִין מִפְּנֵי — We would not know why he killed the first one, since he gave no reason, — מִדֵּי הָרַג אֵת הָרִאשׁוֹן — but from the fact that he commanded the second one, saying to him, “Do not enter through the doorway of the house,”^[46] — אָנוּ יוֹדְעִים שְׂמוֹתוֹךְ בֶּן הָרַג לְרֵאשׁוֹן — we can know that it was as a result of this infraction that he killed the first one. — לִכְוִנָּה אֵשׁ מִלְּפָנֵי ה' וְהֵאֱבֵל אוֹתָם — Likewise, it is written in regard to the sons of Aaron, A fire came forth from before HASHEM and consumed them (Leviticus 10:2). — אִין אָנוּ — We would not know why they died, since the Torah does not specify a reason,^[47] — אֵלֵא מִמַּה שְׂמַצְנָה אֵת אַהֲרֹן — but from the fact that immediately after the incident [God] commands Aaron, saying to him, Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Tent of Meeting (ibid., v. 9), — אָנוּ יוֹדְעִין מִתּוֹךְ בֶּן — we can know that [the sons of Aaron] did not die but on account of the consumption of wine.^[48]

דָּבָר אַחֵר “וּבְצַפְעוֹנֵי יַפְרָשׁ” — Another interpretation of *like one “separated” by a serpent*: — מַה צָּפְעוֹן זֶה מִפְּרִישׁ בֵּין מֵיתָה לְחַיִּים — Just as the serpent causes a division between life and death, — כִּף הַפְּרִישׁ הַיֵּינן בֵּין עֲשָׂרַת הַשִּׁבְטִים לְשִׁבְטֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְנֵימִין לְגִלּוֹת — so wine caused a “separation” between the other Ten Tribes^[49] and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with regard to exile.^[50] — הָרָא — הוא דְּכַתִּיב “הוּי מְשֻׁבְּמֵי בְּבֹקֶר שָׂכַר יִרְדְּפוּ מֵאַחֲרֵי בְּנֶשֶׁף יוֹן וְיִלְקָח” — Thus it is written, *Woe to those who arise early in the morning to pursue liquor, who stay up late at night while wine inflames them* (Isaiah 5:11), — שְׂמוֹתוֹךְ בֶּן “לִבְנֵי גֵלָה עִמּוֹ מִבְּלֵי דַעַת” — for through this, the following consequence will result: *Therefore my people has been exiled because of ignorance* (ibid., v. 13).^[51] — דָּבָר אַחֵר “וּבְצַפְעוֹנֵי יַפְרָשׁ” — Another interpretation of *like one “separated” by a serpent*: — מַה צָּפְעוֹן זֶה מִפְּרִישׁ בֵּין מֵיתָה לְחַיִּים — Just as the serpent separates between life and death, — כִּף הַפְּרִישׁ הַיֵּינן לְשִׁבְטֵי יְהוּדָה וְשִׁבְטֵי בְנֵימִין לְגִלּוֹת — so wine separated the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin with regard to exile.^[52] — הָרָא הוּא דְּכַתִּיב “וְגַם אֵלֶּה בְּיָוֵן שָׂגוּ וּבְשֹׁכֵר תַעֲבוּ” — Thus it is written, *for they too have erred because of wine, and strayed because of liquor* (Isaiah 28:7). — אֵלֶּה וְגַם אֵלֶּה — Scripture could have stated simply “they have erred etc.”; by writing *for they “too” have erred* it implies that “they” (the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) were guilty of drunken excess in the same manner as the Ten Tribes.^[53] — דָּבָר אַחֵר “וּבְצַפְעוֹנֵי יַפְרָשׁ” — Another interpretation of *like one “separated” by a serpent*: — מַה צָּפְעוֹן זֶה מִפְּרִישׁ בֵּין מֵיתָה לְחַיִּים — Just as the serpent separates between life and death, — כִּף הַפְּרִישׁ הַיֵּינן בֵּין מַלְכוּת לְמַלְכוּת לְהַרְיָגָה — so wine caused a separation between one kingdom and another with regard to the assassination of the reigning king.

NOTES

44. The parallel passage in *Vayikra Rabbah* has כְּנִיּוֹת, “taverns” (see *Rashash* and *Matnos Kehunah* here), and *Matnos Kehunah* recommends changing the text here to correspond to that reading as well. According to this version, the domestic’s misdeed was that he was caught going to a tavern for a drink while on duty.

45. Lit., in silence.

46. Or “the taverns.” The domestic had been caught using the entrance of the house (or frequenting taverns), and that is why he was executed.

47. Although Scripture states, *Nadab and Abihu... brought before HASHEM an alien fire that He had not commanded them* (Leviticus 10:1), this Midrash is of the opinion that they were not punished so severely solely for an unauthorized act of Divine service (see *Yefeh Anaf*). It must be that they transgressed some other offense, which Scripture does not specify, for which the death penalty was warranted. As the Midrash proceeds to explain, we can derive the identity of this capital offense from the context.

48. In the parable, the servant had not been told explicitly not to enter through the door (or the taverns), but being a “trusted domestic” he should have realized by himself that it was inappropriate to do so. So too, the prohibition against entering the Sanctuary after having drunk wine had not yet been commanded, but Nadab and Abihu, given their lofty spiritual level, should have realized that this was grossly inappropriate (*Yefeh Anaf*). That this was indeed the reason for their punishment is made clear by the fact that their death is followed immediately by God’s explicit command to Aaron not to enter the Sanctuary in this state.

49. Of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, rival to the Kingdom of Judah of the House of David (see *I Kings* Ch. 12). This kingdom comprised ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, the other two being Judah and Benjamin, who remained loyal to the House of David (ibid., vv. 21-23).

50. The Ten Tribes were conquered by Assyria and sent to exile approximately 130 years before the banishment of the Kingdom of Judah and the destruction of the First Temple at the hands of Babylonia. The Midrash, based on the following proof texts, attributes the precedence of their exile to their overindulgence in wine and their drunken revelry. Apparently, the Midrash maintains that the people of Judah and

of Benjamin withstood the Assyrian siege and survived in their land for more than a century because they were not (yet) guilty of such excesses. See, however, the Midrash below and notes 51 and 53, which state that when Judah and Benjamin were eventually forced into exile, this was also on account of their indulgence in wine.

51. The “people” in this verse, as interpreted by this Midrash, refer to the members of the Ten Tribes, who due to their pursuit of wine (and other hedonistic pleasures) were left “ignorant” of any Torah knowledge and wisdom, and as a consequence, were forced to go into exile, and in effect became lost from the people of Israel. See *Radak to Isaiah* ad loc. [It should be noted that these verses make no reference to the Ten Tribes specifically, and indeed the Midrash below proceeds to say, based on a passage in *Isaiah 28*, that the tribes of Judah and Benjamin too were exiled on account of their overindulgence in wine. Nonetheless, the Midrash understands these verses as referring specifically to the Ten Tribes because *Isaiah 28* presents primarily the drunkenness of the Ten Tribes (and its consequences), and only secondarily that of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. It should be assumed then, when *Isaiah* speaks of these selfsame issues in Ch. 5, that he is referring specifically to the Ten Tribes. Moreover, the fact that the verse speaks of the exile in the past tense indicates that *Isaiah* is recounting here the exile of the Ten Tribes, which had already transpired during his days, and is not prophesying about the eventual exile of Judah and Benjamin (*Yefeh Anaf*.)]

52. I.e., wine caused them to be separated from their homeland.

53. Previously (see ibid., vv. 1-4) that passage speaks of the downfall of “the drunkards of Ephraim,” a reference to the Ten Tribes, who are identified as “Ephraim” because their king was Jeroboam son of Nebat of Ephraim. [Moreover, the tribe of Ephraim was the largest and most influential of the Ten Tribes (*Radak to Amos 6:6*.)] Had Scripture subsequently written “they have erred because of wine,” we would have said that the antecedent of the “they” is *the drunkards of Ephraim*. However, since Scripture states *for they “too” have erred because of wine*, the Midrash derives that *Isaiah* here refers to others, i.e., the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, whose actions and fate paralleled those of the Ten Tribes. *Isaiah* then attributes the exile of each of these groups to its overindulgence in wine.

“הָדָא הוּא דְכִתְיִב “בְּלִשְׁאֲצַר אָמַר בְּטַעַם חֲמָרָא” — Thus it is written, while under the influence of wine, Belshazzar gave an order to bring the golden and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar his [grand]father had removed from the sanctuary that was in Jerusalem... to drink from them (Daniel 5:2), שְׂמִתּוֹךְ כִּף — אָמַר — as a result of which [Scripture] states, “בֵּיהּ בְּלִילִיאָא” — That very night Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was slain (ibid., v. 30).^[54]

The Midrash offers its final exposition on the verse in *Proverbs*, applying it to the subject matter of the verse at hand (in *Esther*): “דְּבַר אַחַר — יוֹכַצְפֻעֵי וְיָרִישׁ” — Another interpretation of like one “separated” by a serpent: מַה צְפֻעוֹן זֶה מְפָרִישׁ בֵּין מֵיתָה לְחַיִּים — Just as the serpent separates between life and death, כִּף — מַה צְפֻעוֹן זֶה מְפָרִישׁ בֵּין אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ לְוַשְׁתִּי לְהַרְיָגָה — so wine caused a division between Ahasuerus and Vashti with regard to her being put to death.^[55] “הָדָא הוּא דְכִתְיִב “בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כָּטוּב לֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיּוֹם” — Thus it is written, — On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he told Mehuman... to bring Queen Vashti before the king [adorned] with the royal crown, to show off to the people and the officials her beauty (Esther 1:10), שְׂמִתּוֹךְ — כִּף — as a result of which [Ahasuerus] became enraged with [Vashti] for not coming before him,^[56] and put her to death.^[57]

אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּשְׁף חֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ זָכַר אֶת וַשְׁתִּי וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשְׂתָהּ וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ.
After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what had been decreed against her (2:1).

§2 אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּשְׁף חֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ — AFTER THESE THINGS, WHEN THE WRATH OF KING AHASUERUS SUBSIDED.

We are not told explicitly how much time elapsed between the killing of Vashti and the abatement of Ahasuerus' anger. The Midrash cites a dispute that relates to this issue:

אָמַר רַבִּי אֵיבּוּ בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶן זִמְרָא — R' Eivu said in the name of R' Yose ben Zimra: כָּל מְקוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר “אַחַר”, כְּמוֹךְ — Wherever the word *achar* (after) is stated in Scripture, it means soon after the events mentioned previously, מוֹפְלֵג — “אַחַרִּי”, — while where Scripture states *acharei* (another word for after), it is long after the events mentioned previously.^[58] וְרַבָּנָן מוֹשִׁיבֵי רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶן זִמְרָא — But the other Rabbis said the reverse in the name of R' Yose ben Zimra: כָּל מְקוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר “אַחַרִּי”, כְּמוֹךְ — Wherever the word *acharei* is stated in Scripture, it means soon after the events mentioned previously, מוֹפְלֵג — “אַחַר”, — while where Scripture states *achar* it is long after the events mentioned previously.^[59]

□ כִּשְׁף חֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ — WHEN THE WRATH OF KING AHASUERUS SUBSIDED.

The Midrash notes that the word *כִּשְׁף* (literally, “as [his wrath] subsided”) can bear a further connotation as well:

“כִּשְׁף” — אֵין כְּתִיב בְּאֵין אֶלֶּא “כִּשְׁף” — It is not written here *be'shoch* [כִּשְׁף], which would have unambiguously yielded the translation, “when the wrath... subsided,” but *ke'shoch* [כִּשְׁף], meaning, “as the wrath... subsided,” which lends itself to the implication: “it was as if the wrath... subsided.”^[60] שְׂכִיכָה שְׂאִינָה שְׂכִיכָה — This indicates that there was a certain calming of Ahasuerus' anger, but not a total calming.^[61]

□ זָכַר אֶת וַשְׁתִּי — HE REMEMBERED VASHTI, AND WHAT SHE HAD DONE, AND WHAT HAD BEEN DECREED AGAINST HER.

The verse mentions three things that the king remembered: (i) Vashti, (ii) what she had done, and (iii) what had been decreed against her. What is meant by these three items? Furthermore,

NOTES

54. The next verse states, *Then Darius the Mede received the kingship*. With the assassination of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian king, the Babylonian Empire came to an end, and was succeeded by the Median/Persian Empire. The catalyst for this “separation” or transferral of rule from one kingdom to another, observes the Midrash, was Belshazzar's intoxication at the drunken feast. [Although the sin that precipitated his death was the sacrilege involved in his using the sacred Temple vessels at that banquet, this Midrash makes the point that had he not been inebriated he would have never exercised such poor judgment (*Yefeh Anaf; Eitz Yosef*).]

55. It was wine that was responsible for separating Ahasuerus from his wife Vashti, through her death.

56. Had Ahasuerus not had too much to drink, he would not have issued a command for Vashti to appear before him in the demeaning manner that he did (see Midrash below, §2); nor would he have become so infuriated at her refusal to do so.

57. Although Scripture does not state explicitly that Vashti was executed — and it is indeed the opinion of some commentators (e.g., *R' Yeshayah DeTrani* to *Esther* 1:19) that she was punished in other ways — it is

the predominant opinion among the Sages (here, above, 4 §8 and §11; *Megillah* 11b; *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* §49) that Ahasuerus punished her with the death penalty.

58. And since Scripture here uses אַחַר, it indicates that Ahasuerus' wrath subsided and (as the Midrash proceeds to explain) he regrets set in soon after he had put her to death. See Insight (A).

59. According to this opinion, אַחַר here indicates that there was a substantial lapse of time between the killing of Vashti and the events related in this verse. See Insight (A).

60. The prefix כִּ means “as,” and has the double connotation of serving as a conjunction meaning “while” or “when,” and a preposition meaning “like.” According to the simple meaning, the כִּ of כִּשְׁף is used in the first sense: “When his wrath subsided.” However, the Midrash notes that it could also be interpreted to mean “it was like his wrath subsided,” implying that this was not a true, complete abatement of anger.

61. The king's anger was totally assuaged only later upon the killing of Haman (below, 7:10), or when Esther became queen. See Midrash above, 3 §15.

INSIGHTS

(A) **Pace of Change** *Eitz Yosef* explains why it is of significance whether Ahasuerus' wrath subsided immediately after Vashti's execution or at a later time.

According to the first opinion of the Midrash, that Ahasuerus calmed down soon after the Vashti incident, he explains: Logically speaking one would not expect Ahasuerus to have a change of heart right after the extreme action he had undertaken. The fact that he did shows that Ahasuerus' wrath was Divinely inspired and orchestrated so as to bring about Vashti's death and Esther's ascension (see Midrash below). Once that objective had been achieved, and the wrath no longer served a viable function, it immediately dissipated (from *Ohr Chadash*).

Regarding the Midrash's second opinion, that it was a long time before Ahasuerus' wrath abated, he explains: As the Midrash will soon discuss, the continuation of this verse implies that while the intense anger of Ahasuerus began to abate, his anger did continue to smolder to some degree. Thus, it is the sense of this verse that although quite some time had elapsed since Vashti had been killed, nonetheless the king retained some of his angry mood, which was “reserved” for venting toward Haman, after whose hanging “the king's anger abated” (below, 7:10) totally (see above, 3 §15). Here too, the point is to show that it was God Who was orchestrating the seemingly mundane, “unremarkable” events of the Purim story.

Vashti's offense was that she did *not* do something, so the expression "what she had done" seems inappropriate.^[62] Furthermore, the verse does not specify what the result of Ahasuerus' "remembering" all these things was. The Midrash elaborates:

גְּזִירָה זֹאת שֶׁגִּזַּר עָלֶיהָ שֶׁתִּכְנַס לְכַנּוּ עֵרוּמָה – *He remembered Vashti refers to this decree that he had decreed upon her that she enter in his presence unclothed,*^[63] וְלֹא נִכְנְסָה וְקִצְף עָלֶיהָ וְהָרָגָה – *and he remembered that she had not done so, and that he had become enraged with her and put her to death.*^[64] מִן דְּקָטְלָהּ – *Once he put her to death, he began to regret his decision.*^[65] לָמָּה – *And why was he remorseful?* שָׂרֵי תְהֵי בֵיהּ (חֹזֵר בּוֹ) – *For he realized that she had done (i.e., conducted herself) what was proper,*^[67] וְיָאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ שֶׁלֹּא כְרוּזָן – *and that what had been decreed against her (i.e., the death penalty) was not proper, i.e., it was unjust.*^[68] וְלָמָּה עָלְתָה לָּהּ – *And why did this fate come upon her?*^[69] לָפִי שֶׁלֹּא הָיְתָה – *Because she did not allow Ahasuerus to give permission for the Holy Temple to be built,*^[70] וְיֹאמְרָת לּוֹ – *for she said to him, מה שֶׁהֲחָרִיבוּ*

אֲבוֹתַי אֲתָה מִבְּקֵשׁ לְבִנוֹת – *“What my forefathers destroyed, you seek to rebuild!”*^[71]

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נְעָרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו יִבְקְשׁוּ לְמִלְךָ נְעָרוֹת בְּתוּלוֹת טוֹבוֹת מְרָאָה. וַיִּפְקֵד הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים בְּכָל מְדִינוֹת מְלְכוּתוֹ וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת כָּל נְעָרָה בְּתוּלָה טוֹבָת מְרָאָה אֶל שׁוֹשַׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל בֵּית הַנְּשִׂים אֶל יַד הַגָּאֵר סְרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁמֶר הַנְּשִׂים וְנִתּוֹן תְּמַרוֹקֵיהֶן.

Then the king's attendants said, “Let there be sought for the king young maidens of beautiful appearance; and let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they gather together every young maiden of beautiful appearance to Shushan the capital, to the harem, under the charge of Hegai, the king's chamberlain, guardian of the women; and let their cosmetics be given them” (2:2-3).

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נְעָרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו וְגוֹ' – *THEN THE KING'S ATTENDANTS SAID, ETC.*^[72]

NOTES

62. *Tiferes Tzion*.

63. See above, 3 §13.

64. See verse 1:12 and Midrash above, 3 §13 and 4 §1. These are the events referred to in the verse's statement that Ahasuerus remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.

65. [These two words were originally an explanatory marginal gloss for the previous two (Aramaic) words, and eventually made their way into the text of the Midrash. We have followed the practice of the Vilna edition and enclosed them in parentheses.]

66. Scripture does not tell us what Ahasuerus did as a result of his "remembering Vashti and what she had done, etc." (as mentioned in the introductory comment). The Midrash explains that the remembrance caused him to regret his actions.

67. For dignity (the hallmark of a royal woman — see *Psalms* 45:14) and modesty dictated that she was justified in not acceding to her husband's brazen request (*Eitz Yosef*). Although Vashti's misdeed consisted of *not* following Ahasuerus' orders, the expression "what she had done" is appropriate, because she "did" the right thing by not coming before him.

68. I.e., when the verse states that Ahasuerus "remembered" what had been decreed against Vashti, it does not mean that beforehand he had forgotten about it. It would indeed be very strange to suppose that Ahasuerus was so absent minded as to forget that he had executed his own wife! Rather, it means that he came to realize (not literally "remember") that what had been done to her was unfair.

69. Since Vashti acted properly, it is remarkable that Ahasuerus punished her so severely (as he himself now realized). Surely this indicates that Ahasuerus' wrath and exaggerated punishment were the result of Divine Providence. The Midrash therefore asks why God saw fit to punish her in this manner (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*).

70. The reconstruction of the Temple had begun during the reign of

Cyrus, a predecessor of Ahasuerus (see *Ezra* 1:2-3). Vashti prevailed upon Ahasuerus to halt the reconstruction. It should be noted that *Ezra* Ch. 4 records that "the enemies of Judah and Benjamin" wrote a letter to the Persian authorities conveying their objections to the Jewish rebuilding taking place in Jerusalem, and the king responded by issuing an order for construction to stop. Nonetheless, the Midrash indicts Vashti, for it was she who advised the king to pay heed to the complainants (*Yefeh Anaf*).

71. Vashti was the granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar (see *Megillah* 10b), the Babylonian king who destroyed the First Temple. See *Insight A*.

72. The Midrash does not offer any commentary on these words. It would therefore appear that they should be joined to the following section; i.e., they are part of the Scriptural quote that serves as the heading for section §3. However, in all printed editions they are presented as a separate entity from section §3.

[A possible explanation for this may be gathered from the Midrash version found in several manuscripts, where the following passage — omitted in printed editions — appears at the end of this section:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נְעָרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו – *THEN THE KING'S ATTENDANTS SAID.* וְשִׁבְעַת שָׂרֵי פָּרַס וּמְדֵי הַיָּבֵן הֵן, שְׁנַעְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִדְּבָרִים – *And where were "the seven officers of Persia and Media," the king's official advisers, mentioned above (1:14), that these "king's attendants (lit., boys)" should now speak up before the king and give him advice? אֵלָּא מִלְּמַד שֶׁקָּצַף – However, the explanation for this is that [Ahasuerus] became furious with [those officers] for convincing him to execute Vashti, and he killed them. שָׂאִין מִבְּיַד אוֹתוֹן עוֹר – For indeed you see that [Scripture] does not mention [these seven officers] again.*

It may be surmised, then, that at one point a copyist omitted this comment for some reason, and simply wrote וְגוֹ' after the heading, indicating that there is a continuation to this Midrash.]

INSIGHTS

A Vashti's Punishment We have learned above, in the *Pesichta* (§12), that Vashti's death had been foreordained years earlier when God decreed the elimination of the line of the evil Nebuchadnezzar, of which Vashti was the sole survivor (see our commentary there). These sources do not represent a contradiction to our Midrash, which attributes Vashti's death to her having prevented the rebuilding of the Temple. For the Gemara (*Berachos* 7a) teaches that a child may suffer as a consequence of a parent's sins only if the child perpetuates those sins. Thus, while Nebuchadnezzar's curse indeed resulted in Vashti's death, it did so only because Vashti, through her behavior described here, was complicit in her forebear's crime of destroying the Temple. As our Midrash states, it was Vashti herself who insisted, "That which my fathers destroyed, you (Ahasuerus) want to rebuild!" God originally

foretold the decimation of Nebuchadnezzar's house through Vashti's eventual death only because He knew then that she would one day continue her grandfather's evil ways (see *Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*).

Yet another earlier Midrash (3 §3) taught that both Ahasuerus and Vashti were faulted for feasting in celebration of the Temple's destruction. As explained in our commentary there, Vashti's misdeed was more scandalous than Ahasuerus' because her own father, Belshazzar, had died for the very offenses that his daughter now committed.

Vashti met her death on the very last of the many days of celebrating the Temple's destruction. It thus emerges that God chose to strike her down precisely at the very height of her perpetuation of the sins of her forebears, who had destroyed the Temple and blasphemously rejoiced in its continued ruin.

§3 וַיִּפְקֵד הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מְלֻכּוֹתוֹ — AND LET THE KING APPOINT COMMISSIONERS IN ALL THE PROVINCES OF HIS KINGDOM, THAT THEY GATHER TOGETHER EVERY MAIDEN OF BEAUTIFUL APPEARANCE TO SHUSHAN, ETC.

מָה רָאָה — Why did [God] see fit to subject the women of Ahasuerus' kingdom to such humiliation?^[73] — אָמַר רַבִּי הוּנָא — R' Huna said: — עַל יְדֵי שֶׁהָיוּ מְבוֹזוֹת בְּבָנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעוֹרוֹת — Because [the girls] of the kingdom would demean the daughters of Israel by calling them "ugly,"^[74] — וְאֵין כָּל בְּרִיָּה מְשַׁגִּיחַ עֲלֵיהֶם — and by saying that nobody paid any attention to them, — לְפִיכָךְ בָּאוּ לַיְדֵי הַמְּסַפֵּק הַזֶּה — therefore they came into this predicament.^[75]

The Midrash provides another example that demonstrates the contempt with which the nations of Ahasuerus' time regarded the Jews.^[76]

רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בַר שִׁילְקָא וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ דְּסַבְּנִין וְרַבִּי לִוִּי בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמְרוּ — R' Chanina bar Shilka, R' Yehoshua of Sichnin, and R' Levi in the name of R' Yochanan said: — יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגוֹי דְרִים בְּחָצֵר — If a Jew and a non-Jew dwelled together in one courtyard,^[77] — וְשָׂפָה יִשְׂרָאֵל קִדְרְתוֹ וְנִגְעָה בָּהּ הַגּוֹי — and the Jew set his pot on a fire in the courtyard, and it happened that the non-Jewish neighbor touched it, — אֵינָה טְמֵאָה — [the pot] would not be considered contaminated by the Jew. — שָׂפָה הַגּוֹי קִדְרְתוֹ — If, however, the non-Jew set his pot on the fire, and it happened that the Jew touched it, — הוּא אֹמֵר טְמֵאָה — [the non-Jew] would say, "[The pot] is contaminated!" and he would discard its contents. — וְנִפְלוּ לְתוֹכָהּ בְּמַה שֶׁקָּצִים וְרַמְשִׁים — Even if a number of insects or creeping creatures would fall into [the food] in the pot [the non-Jew] would eat it, — וְאִם יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹשֶׂה אֶת שְׂלוֹ לְתוֹכָהּ — but if a Jew were to make his own food in [the non-Jew's pot], — הוּא שׁוֹבְרָה — [the non-Jew] would regard it as contaminated and smash it.^[78]

The Midrash cites another example of a nation that oppressed the daughters of Israel, and was punished in kind.^[79]

לִכְוִיָּהּ — Likewise, it is written in regard to the punishment to be meted out to Babylonia: — הַשְּׂמִיעוּ עַל כָּל רַבִּים בְּכָל דְרָבִי

— Mobilize against Babylonia, you marksmen, all who draw a bow, etc., let her not have any survivor. Repay her according to her actions; do unto her according to all that she has done, for she has acted wickedly toward HASHEM (Jeremiah 50:29). — וְכִי בָסָף נִטְלָה שְׂתַתֵּן כֶּסֶף — Now, how is Babylonia to be repaid according to her actions? Did it take silver spoils, so that it should give up silver as recompense? — וְהִב נִטְלָה שְׂתַתֵּן — Did it take gold spoils, so that it should give up gold as recompense?^[80] — נִשְׁשִׁים בְּצִיּוֹן עֲנִי — No, Babylonia's pillage of the Israelites extended far beyond precious metals, as it is written, *They ravaged women in Zion* (Lamentations 5:11)! — מָה תַתֵּן — אֵלָּא כֶּף אָמַר — What, then, shall she give as recompense?^[81] — הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא — However, the explanation of this verse is that this is what the Holy One, blessed is He, said to Babylonia, as it were, — אַתְּמָם לְהוֹטִים אַחֵר הַעֲרֹה — "You are obsessed with promiscuity. — חַיִּיכֶם שְׂאֵנִי מְבִיא עֲלֵיכֶם אֹמְנָה שְׂאֵנָה מְבַקֶּשֶׁת מִכֶּם לֹא כֶּסֶף — By your lives, I swear that I am bringing against you a nation that seeks from you neither silver nor gold, — הִיא הוּא דְרָתִיב בַּבְּלוֹנְיָה, — הִנְנִי מַעִיר עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מְדֵי אֲשֶׁר כֶּסֶף לֹא יִחְשְׁבוּ וְזָהָב לֹא — Behold, I shall arouse Medea against them, who will not value silver and will not desire gold (Isaiah 13:17). — וְמָה מְבַקֶּשֶׁת מִכֶּם — What is it, then, that [Medea] will seek from you? — וְקִשְׁתוֹת נְעָרִים תִּרְשָׁנָה וּפְרֵי בֶטֶן לֹא יִרְחֲמוּ וְגו' — Their bows will sunder young men; they will show no mercy for the fruit of the womb, etc. (ibid., v. 18)."^[82]

□ אֵל יֵד הִגָּא סְרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַנְּשִׁים — UNDER THE CHARGE OF HEGAI, THE KING'S CHAMBERLAIN, GUARDIAN OF THE WOMEN.

Below (v. 14), we are told of a different chamberlain, named Shaashgaz, who was also a guardian of women. The Midrash discusses the difference between them:

וְהָיָה מְמוּנָה עַל — He was one who was "effaced,"^[83] — מְחֻוֵי הָיָה — and he was placed in charge of the maidens.^[84] — וְדְכוּתִיָּהּ — אֵל יֵד שְׁעִשְׂגוּ סְרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַפְּלִגְשִׁים

NOTES

73. Since in the process of selecting a new queen all the maidens were summoned for a "trial" with Ahasuerus, it emerges that when the king selected only one as his queen all the maidens not chosen by him had merely been violated by the king (*Matnos Kehunah*; see *Megillah* 12b). See Insight A.

74. *Matnos Kehunah*; cf. *Yefeh Anaf* and *Eitz Yosef*.

75. Because they derided the Jewish girls, saying that they were so ugly that no one would take an interest in them, their punishment was that they themselves were rejected in favor of a Jewish girl (*Matnos Kehunah*).

76. *Yefeh Anaf*; *Eitz Yosef*.

77. I.e., they lived in two houses that opened into a common courtyard.

78. The Jew, then, was regarded with greater disgust than vermin. The Midrash sees the belittling manner in which the young maidens from all over the kingdom were treated, and the fact that they were all ultimately rejected in favor of Esther, as just recompense for the loathing abomination with which the Jews were treated (ibid.).

79. *Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*.

80. Elucidation based on *Eitz Yosef*. See *Maharzu*.

81. We have followed the emendation of *Os Emes*, who changes the original reading, ת"ל (an abbreviation for תלמוד לומר, to תתן. (Similarly, *Yefeh Toar* changes to תתן לתשלומין, apparently meaning to say that this is the proper interpretation of the abbreviation of ת"ל here.) *Matnos Kehunah*, however, provides an explanation for the reading לומר ("Why does Scripture state?"): Since the Babylonians will not make recompense with silver and gold, what does Scripture mean by *Repay her according to her actions*?

82. I.e., since Babylonia inflicted irreparable damage on Israelite women by violating them, they were punished corporeally, in like manner.

83. The word סריס can mean either "chamberlain" (as we have translated it in the *Megillah* text) or "eunuch." The Midrash interprets it in the latter sense: Hegai was "effaced," or castrated.

84. As an eunuch, he was fit to be placed in charge of the maidens.

INSIGHTS

A Why the King Saw Fit Why does the Midrash see God's hand at work here more than in the other details of the Purim story? *Tiferes Zion* explains that the premise of the Midrash here is its teaching above (3 §10) that wherever the *Megillah* uses the term "king" without specifying "Ahasuerus," the reference is also to the King of kings. When Ahasuerus acquiesced to the suggestion his ministers had made to "the king," he was doing so as the agent of the King of kings. The Midrash therefore asks: Why did "He" see fit to have the maidens from the entire

empire brought to Ahasuerus? If God's purpose was to have Esther installed as the new queen, it would have been enough that the maidens from Shushan alone, where Esther lived, be brought to Ahasuerus. To this R' Huna answers that this was God's retribution to the fair ones of the Persian Empire for having denigrated the daughters of Israel as ugly. Their beauty became their undoing, as they were taken to the king's harem, never to live a normal life, while one of the Jewesses they had denigrated was chosen as queen.

Scripture below states, *In the evening she would come, and in the morning^[85] she would return to the second harem in the charge of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, guardian of the*

concubines (below, v. 14); שְׁחוּף הָיָה — [Shaashgaz] was one who was emasculated,^[86] וְהָיָה מְמוּנָה עַל נָשֵׁי הַנָּשִׂים — and he was placed in charge of the married women.^[87]

NOTES

85. After having spent the night with the king.

86. Here, too, the Midrash interprets סָרִיס as "eunuch."

87. I.e., the women who were not maidens, such as the king's concu-

bines and those girls who had returned from the king. [See *Matnos Kehunah* for discussion of the difference between the terms קָדוּשׁ and שְׁחוּף.]

וְהַנְעִרָה אֲשֶׁר תִּיטֵב בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ תַּחַת וְשָׂתִי וְיִיטֵב
הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן. אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁן הַבִּיּוֹרָה
וְשָׂמוֹ מֶרְדֵּכַי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן שְׁמַעִי בֶּן קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי.
“Then, let the girl who pleases the king reign in place
of Vashti.” The matter pleased the king, and he did so.
There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital whose
name was Mordechai son of Jair son of Shimei son of
Kish, a Benjamite (2:4-5).

§4 וְהַנְעִרָה אֲשֶׁר תִּיטֵב בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְגו' — THEN, LET THE GIRL
WHO PLEASES THE KING, ETC., THERE WAS A JEWISH MAN,
ETC.

The Midrash discusses the significance of the juxtaposition of
these two verses:

Who was suited to providing the solution
for this matter?^[88] — Mordechai! — אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה
— And Scripture thus proceeds in the
very next verse to introduce him: *There was a Jewish man in
Shushan the capital whose name was Mordechai* (below,
2:5).^[89] — וְרַבְּנוֹתֵיהָ “וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים”
— And similarly it is written regarding Israel’s oppression by the
Egyptians, *God saw the Children of Israel; and God knew*
(Exodus 2:25). — Who was suited to provid-
ing the solution for this matter? — מֹשֶׁה — Moses!
— וַיִּמְשָׁה הָיָה — And Scripture thus proceeds in the very next verse to
introduce him: *Moses was shepherding* (ibid. 3:1).^[90] — וְרַבְּנוֹתֵיהָ
— וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל אַנְשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָכֵן אִישׁ לְעִירוֹ
— And similarly it
is written regarding Samuel’s acceptance of the need to appoint
a king over Israel, *Samuel told the men of Israel, “Go, each
man to his city”* (I Samuel 8:22). — Who was
suited to providing the solution for this matter? — שָׁאוּל —
Saul! — וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים — And Scripture thus

proceeds in the very next verse to introduce him, as it is stated,
*There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish . . . and
he had a son named Saul, etc.* (ibid. 9:1-2).^[91] — וְרַבְּנוֹתֵיהָ יִיְשָׁמַע
— שָׁאוּל וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הָאֵלֶּה וַיַּחֲתוּ וַיִּרְאוּ מְאֹד
— And similarly it is written concerning Goliath’s arrogant taunts of
the Israelite soldiers, *Saul and all Israel heard these words
of the Philistine, and they were terrified and greatly afraid*
(ibid. 17:11). — מי הגון לְדַבֵּר זֶה — Who was suited to providing
the solution for this matter? — דָּוִד — David! — וַיְדַוּ בֶּן אִישׁ
— אֶפְרַתִּי הָיָה — Scripture thus proceeds in the very next verse
to introduce him: *David was the son of a certain Ephrathite*
(ibid. v. 12).^[92]

One of the Sages provides two more examples of this
concept:^[93]

R’ Yehoshua bar Avirim said
two more examples: — כְּתִיב “וְהוּא לָחַץ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֹזֶק”
— It is written, and [Sisera] oppressed the Children of Israel harshly
(Judges 4:3).

The Midrash digresses to discuss the exact meaning of the
verse just cited:

— מהו “בְּחֹזֶק” — What is meant by the expression “he oppressed
them harshly” [בְּחֹזֶק]? — אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: בְּחִירוּפִין וּבְגִידוּפִין
— R’ Yitzchak said: It means that he oppressed them with insults
and invectives,^[94] — הִיךְ מֵא דְאֵת אָמַר “חֹזְקוֹ עָלֵי דְבְּרֵיכֻם”
— as it is stated elsewhere, using a similar expression, *Your words have
become harsh* [חֹזְקוֹ] *against Me* (Malachi 3:13).

The Midrash resumes its presentation of the case of Sisera:
— מי הגון לְדַבֵּר זֶה — Who was suited to providing the solution for
this matter? — דְּבוֹרָה — Deborah! — וַיְדַבֵּר אִשָּׁה
— And Scripture thus proceeds in the very
next verse to introduce her, as it is written, *Deborah was a
prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth* (Judges ibid., v. 4).

NOTES

88. I.e., the matter of the king’s search for a new queen. See Insight (A).

89. Scripture could have written: “Then, let the girl who pleases the
king reign in place of Vashti.’ The matter pleased the king, and he did
so. One of the girls taken to the king’s palace was Esther, cousin of
Mordechai son of Jair, who had been exiled from Jerusalem . . .” But
instead, Scripture interrupts its narrative of the king’s search for a
new queen by introducing the character of Mordechai and later merges
this character into the main narrative involving the king’s quest.
Scripture does so to show that it was due to Mordechai’s lineage and
righteousness that his cousin and adopted daughter Esther was now
thrust into her role of savior of the Jews, the individual chosen to be
the vehicle through which God delivered Israel from Haman’s clutches
(*Yefeh Anaf*).

90. Here too, the verse could have stated, “God saw the Children of
Israel; and God knew, and He appeared to Moses — who was in the
wilderness shepherding sheep — from a burning bush.” But instead,

Scripture interrupts its narrative of Israel’s suffering by injecting the
subject of Moses shepherding his father-in-law’s flock. Scripture does
so to show that, due to Moses’ unique qualities, it was he who was now
thrust into the role of deliverer of Israel from Egyptian bondage (ibid.).

91. Here too, Scripture interrupts the story of Samuel’s search for a
king by introducing the character of Saul and recounting the unrelated
story of his seeking out some lost donkeys. Scripture does so to show
that, due to Saul’s unique qualities, he was now thrust into the role of
savior of Israel from the Philistines (ibid.).

92. This, too, is to be understood along the lines of the previous three
examples (see notes 89-91).

93. These examples are also to be understood as above.

94. [Directed against them, or perhaps against God.] The harshness
of Sisera’s oppression was expressed through his attitude and speech,
rather than physical persecution.

INSIGHTS

(A) *The Sins of Judah and Shushan* *Alshich* (2:5) explains that our verse
intimates to us why Mordechai was uniquely suited to act as savior
of the Jews from the troubles that would soon be engulfing them. It
describes Mordechai as אִישׁ (*a man*), which connotes an especially right-
eous person (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 16 §5), and alludes to two instances
where his righteousness was demonstrated:

The first allusion is when the verse refers to Mordechai as a Judahite
when he was in fact a Benjamite. The verse calls him a יְהוּדִי, *a Judahite*,
in reference to his expulsion from Jerusalem and descent into exile.
He was exiled together with the king of Judah, and is thus called a
Judahite. During this period of exile, Mordechai’s conduct among the
Judahites earned him the designation of an especially righteous per-
son; specifically, when Nebuchadnezzar attempted to coerce Israel
to bow to his idol (*Daniel* 3:6). Under the threat of death, many Jews
obeyed. Mordechai, however, remained faithful to God and refused to

transgress such a serious sin (*Alshich* 2:6). Because he acted righteously
during this period, he is called אִישׁ יְהוּדִי, *a righteous man of Judah*.

The verse’s second allusion is with the words: הָיָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁן, *was in
Shushan*. They too allude to Mordechai’s righteous behavior. When
Ahasuerus made his feast in Shushan, many Jews were unable to
withstand temptation and attended the banquet. Mordechai, however,
again acted faithfully and did not attend. Thus, Mordechai’s virtuous
actions twice earned him the title of אִישׁ: when he resisted sin dur-
ing his exile as a Judahite, and again in Shushan. The verse אִישׁ יְהוּדִי
הָיָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁן means not only that Mordechai was a Judahite located in
Shushan, but also that he was a righteous man because of his actions
among the Judahites and in Shushan.

God sent Haman’s evil decree as punishment for Israel’s transgression
of these two aforementioned sins (*Alshich* 2:5). Only Mordechai, who
was free of both transgressions, was fit to bring about its annulment.

The Midrash presents R' Yehoshua's second example:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָעָם שְׂרֵי גִלְעָד אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ מִי — And R' Yehoshua bar Avirim said another example: מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִחַל לְהִלָּחֵם בְּבָנֵי עַמּוּן יִהְיֶה לְרֹאשׁ לְכָל יִשְׁבֵי גִלְעָד — It is written, *The people, the princes of Gilead, said to one another, "Whichever man will begin to do battle against the Children*

of Ammon will become the leader of all the inhabitants of Gilead" (ibid. 10:18). מִי הָגוֹן לְדַבֵּר זֶה — Who was suited to providing the solution for this matter? יִפְתָּח — Jephthah! וַיִּפְתָּח הַגִּלְעָדִי הָיָה גִבּוֹר חַיִל — And Scripture thus proceeds in the very next verse to introduce him: *Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor* (ibid. 11:1).

Chapter 6

איש יהודי הנה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בן שמעי בן קיש איש מיני.

There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital whose name was Mordechai son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjamite (2:5).

§1 The Midrash begins its discussion of this passage by citing and analyzing a verse from *Psalms*:^[1]

"אשרי שמרי משפט עשה צדקה בכל עת" — *Praiseworthy are those who maintain justice, who perform righteousness in every time* (*Psalms* 106:3). נמנו בעליית רבי טרפון ואמרו: איזה הוא שעושה צדקה — [The Sages] took a vote in the attic of R' Tarfon, and they then said:^[2] Who is it that this verse refers to? Who are those who *perform righteousness in every time*? אם תאמר אלו — סופרים ומשנים — *If you were to say that those are the teachers of Scripture and the teachers of Mishnah,*^[3] אינן לא אוכלים — *do they not eat, drink, and sleep?*^[4] אלא — אלו בותבי תפילין ומזוזות — *Rather, one could say that it refers to those who write tefillin and mezuzos.* אינן לא אוכלים ולא שותים — *But do they not eat, drink, and sleep?*^[5] אלא איזהו — *Rather, who is it that performs righteousness in every time?* הוי אומר זה המגיד לתום בתוך בית — *One must say that it is he who raises an orphan in his home.*^[6]

The Midrash elaborates:

— *But can you say that [the orphan] does not roll around naked at night?*^[7] אמרו עדיין — [The Sages] said: Therefore, we still need the interpretation of R' Elazar the Modaite. בא רבי אלעזר — *R' Elazar the Modaite came and taught: The Torah, in this verse,*

is speaking only with regard to the piece of bread that [the orphan] eats in [his benefactor's] home.^[8]

The Midrash now expounds the verse from *Psalms* as related to our passage in *Esther*:

אשרי — *Another exposition of the verse in Psalms: Praiseworthy are those who maintain justice — this refers to Mordechai;*^[9] "עשה צדקה בכל עת" שגידל — *who perform righteousness in every time — this refers to the fact that he raised an orphan, Esther, in his home.*^[10]

The Midrash continues, expounding the following verse in *Psalms*, as well, as related to our passage:

אמר דוד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא — *King David said to the Holy One, blessed is He,* "רבונו של עולם זכרני ה' ברצון עמך" — *"Master of the Universe! Remember me, HASHEM, when You show Your people favor; recall me with Your salvation"* (*ibid.*, v. 4). בשעה — *By this he meant, "Remember me at the time that You will perform a salvation for the nation of Israel through the means of Mordechai and Esther,* את ישראל וישלם עשרת אלפים — *when Haman will have sought to destroy the Jews and will have paid ten thousand silver talents into the hands of those who perform the duties of Ahasuerus,* "דכתיב ויעשרת אלפים כסף וגו'" — *as is written, and I will pay ten thousand silver talents into the hands of those who perform the duties, for deposit in the king's treasuries"* (*below*, 3:9).^[11] מה כתיב שם — *What is it that is written there, i.e., in Scripture's account here of the salvation wrought through Mordechai and Esther? "איש יהודי וגו'" — There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital whose name was Mordechai son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjamite.*^[12]

NOTES

1. This verse is expounded below in reference to Mordechai. However, as is common, the Midrash first offers an exposition more in keeping with the plain meaning of the verse (*Eitz Yosef*).

2. That is, the following interpretation of the verse is to be considered authoritative, for it represents the opinion of the majority of the Sages (see *Eitz Yosef*).

3. I.e., those who teach Scripture and Mishnah to young children (*Matnos Kehunah, Eitz Yosef*). These teachers work continuously with their charges in their efforts at teaching them Torah, and hence one might say that they *perform righteousness in every time* (*Eitz Yosef*).

4. At which time they interrupt their work and thus they do not *perform righteousness in every time*.

5. Based on the parallel text in *Midrash Shocher Tov* on the verse in *Psalms*, *Eitz Yosef* suggests that the Midrash is referring to scribes who then lend the tefillin and *mezuzos* they have written to others, so that they are constantly in use. Thus, unlike the teachers, one could say that indirectly these scribes indeed *perform righteousness in every time* (see *Kesubos* 50a). However, the Midrash rejects this interpretation of the verse because the phrase *עשה צדקה* indicates one who is *himself* performing righteousness rather than one who is responsible for the righteousness performed by others; the scribes are not doing this, for they too, like the teachers, eat, drink, and sleep.

6. See below.

7. The Midrash at this point assumes that the reason that one who raises an orphan in his house is regarded as always performing righteousness is because the orphan is wearing clothing that the householder provides for his use (see *Eitz Yosef*). The Midrash therefore objects that the orphan would remove his clothes at night when he goes to sleep, and at that time the householder is thus not performing righteousness. *Maharzu* notes that it can be assumed that one who raises an orphan in his home would also provide him with a blanket with which to cover himself. He suggests that the Midrash means that at times the blanket would fall off, leaving the orphan completely uncovered.

[*Eitz Yosef* adds that even if the tefillin and *mezuzos* lent by the scribe are in constant use, the scribe is not performing righteousness in the same sense as the one providing clothing for the orphan, for although the borrower is using the articles of the scribe to fulfill God's commandments, he is not actually benefiting from them as the orphan benefits from the clothes; see *Rosh Hashanah* 28a.]

8. That is, it is because of the bread that the householder gives to the orphan, not because of the clothing he provides him, that he is deemed to be performing *righteousness in every time*. Although the householder is not constantly giving the orphan bread, as long as it is the householder's bread that is sustaining the orphan, the householder is considered to be performing righteousness. Accordingly, it is appropriate to say that one who raises an orphan in his house performs *righteousness in every time*, even when the orphan is lying uncovered at night, for he is still being sustained by the householder's bread (*Eitz Yosef* see *Maharzu* for an alternative explanation).

See *Kesubos* 50a for a somewhat different understanding of this verse.

9. *Those who maintain justice* denotes Mordechai, for he taught the Jews the ordinances of the Torah; see below, 6 §2 (*Eitz Yosef*).

10. Below, verse 7. As explained in the first exposition, one who raises an orphan in his house performs *righteousness in every time*.

[*Yefeh Anaf* writes that while according to the first interpretation the verse is discussing two separate people or two separate classes of people, *those who maintain justice* and *those who perform righteousness in every time*, according to this exposition the entire verse is referring to the same person.]

11. King David was asking that God should include some allusion to himself in the story of Mordechai and Esther and the foiling of Haman's plot.

12. Mordechai is described as *איש יהודי*, lit., *a Judahite*, Judah being the tribe of King David, even though Mordechai's tribal lineage was from Benjamin, as the verse concludes (*Eitz Yosef*). [The Midrash returns at

§2 אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבְּיָרָה — *THERE WAS A JEWISH MAN IN SHUSHAN THE CAPITAL WHOSE NAME WAS MORDECHAI SON OF YAIR . . . A BENJAMITE.*

The Midrash explains the significance of introducing Mordechai as אִישׁ, *a man*.^[13]

”אִישׁ” מִלְמַד שֶׁהָיָה מְרַדְּכֵי שְׁקוּל בְּדוֹרוֹ בְּמִשְׁהַ בְּדוֹרוֹ, דְּכַתִּיב בֵּיהּ ”וְהָאִישׁ

”מִשָּׁה עָנּוּ מְאֹד” — The term *man* indicates that Mordechai was equivalent in his generation to Moses in his generation,^[14] for regarding [Moses] it is similarly written, *Now the “man” Moses was exceedingly humble (Numbers 12:3).* מִה מִשָּׁה עָמַד בְּפָרֶץ — Just as Moses stood in the breach, interceding on behalf of the Jewish people,^[15]

NOTES

greater length to the issue of Mordechai being called יְהוּדִי despite his Benjamite lineage in the following section. See also note 21 there.]

Eitz Yosef, citing *Alshich*, explains that David was claiming a role in the Purim miracle because even though Mordechai's ancestor Shimei had cursed him (see *II Samuel* 16:5-12 and 19:17-24), David had spared his life and thereby enabled Mordechai to be born. It is in acknowledgment of this role that Scripture refers to Mordechai as אִישׁ יְהוּדִי, *a Judahite* — an allusion to the fact that Mordechai owed his existence to King David who had come from Judah (see *Megillah* 12b).

See *Yefeh Anaf* and *Maharzu* for an alternate explanation.

13. It would have been more straightforward for the verse to have simply stated, *Mordechai the Jew, the son of Jair, etc., was in Shushan the capital*, without the introduction, *There was a Jewish man whose name was, etc.* (*Eitz Yosef*).

14. That is, the role Mordechai played for his generation was similar to the role that Moses had played in his day.

15. In the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf.

" — דְּכָתִיב וַיֵּאמֶר לְהִשְׁמִידֵם לְוִלֵי מֹשֶׁה בְּחִירוֹ עַמְדָּה בְּפָרֶץ וְגו' — as it is written, *had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him to turn away His wrath from destroying* (Psalms 106:23), " — אַף מְרַדְּכֵי בֶן, דְּכָתִיב "רַדְּשׁ טוֹב לְעַמּוֹ וְדָבַר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל יִרְעוּ" — so too did Mordechai, as it is written regarding Mordechai, *he sought the good of his people and spoke for the welfare of all its seed* (below, 10:3).¹⁶ מֵה מֹשֶׁה לִימַד תּוֹרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, דְּכָתִיב "רָאָה לְמִדְתִּי — A further parallel: *Just as Moses taught Torah to the Jewish people, as it is written, See, I have taught you decrees and ordinances* (Deuteronomy 4:5), אַף מְרַדְּכֵי — so too did Mordechai, as it is written, *Dispatches were sent to all the Jews... [with] words of peace and truth* (below, 9:30), and it is written similarly elsewhere in Scripture, *Purchase truth, do not sell it — wisdom, discipline, and understanding* (Proverbs 23:23).¹⁷

□ וְשֵׁמוֹ מְרַדְּכֵי — ... WHOSE NAME WAS MORDECHAI SON OF YAIR, ETC.

The Midrash discusses the structure of this phrase: " — הַרְשָׁעִים קוֹדְמִין לְשֵׁמֵן: "נָבֵל שְׁמוֹ", "שָׁבַע בֶּן בְּכָרֵי שְׁמוֹ" — In Scripture, when names are given, the wicked themselves are mentioned before the reference to their names,¹⁸ as in the verse, *Nabal is his name* (I Samuel 25:25); and in the verse, *Sheba son of Bichri is his name* (II Samuel 20:21). אֲבָל הַצְּדִיקִים שְׁמֵן קוֹדֵם — However, with regard to the righteous the reference to their names precedes the mention of themselves,¹⁹ as in the verses: " — וַיִּשְׁמוּ מְנוּחָה" — *There was a certain man of Zorah... whose name was Manoah* (Judges 13:2); " — וַיִּשְׁמוּ קִישׁ", " — וַיִּשְׁמוּ שְׂאוּל" — *There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish... he had a son whose name was Saul* (I Samuel 9:1-2); " — אֶלְקָנָה" — *There was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim, from Mount Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah* (ibid. 1:1);

NOTES

16. Indicating that Mordechai similarly interceded on behalf of the Jewish nation. *Eitz Yosef* writes that the term *איש*, *man*, is apt for one who acts diligently and forcefully when there is a breach that threatens. The verses cited here indicate that this was a trait shared by both Moses and Mordechai. See Insight (A).

17. The word *truth* in the *Proverbs* verse clearly refers to the Torah; see *Berachos* 5b. The Midrash is arguing that the *words of peace and truth* in *Esther* 9:30 similarly refer to Torah, and indicate that Mordechai was

disseminating Torah through these dispatches that he was sending to all the Jews.

[For a discussion of the particular significance of these specific similarities, see Insight (B).]

18. That is, in reference to the wicked, Scripture will mention the person's name before stating that it is his name. See examples that follow.

19. I.e., the reverse is true, the fact that it is a person's name precedes the mention of the actual name.

INSIGHTS

(A) **Salvation Through Prayer** In what manner did Mordechai "stand in the breach"? The *Megillah* (2:5) introduces Mordechai as בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן שִׁמְעִי בֶּן קִישׁ, *Mordechai the son of Yair, son of Shimei, son of Kish*. The Talmud (*Megillah* 12b) explains that these three names do not merely describe Mordechai's lineage, but actually allude to qualities of Mordechai himself. [The word בֶּן can refer to the state of the person himself (see *Iyun Yaakov* to *Yoma* 39b).] He is called בֶּן יָאִיר, for he brightened the eyes of the Jews through his prayer (יָאִיר from *light*); he is called בֶּן שִׁמְעִי, for God heeded his prayers (שָׁמַע from *He heard*); he is called בֶּן קִישׁ, for he knocked on the gates of mercy, begging that the Jews be saved (קִישׁ from *he knocked*). Indeed, Mordechai's first reaction upon hearing of Haman's evil decree was to pray, and he continued doing so until the salvation was complete (*Shemos Rabbah* 38 §4, with *Eitz Yosef*; see also below, 10 §6).

This is the meaning of the Midrash at hand. Just as Moses had "stood in the breach" through prayer, accomplishing salvation for the Jews after they had sinned with the golden calf [as King David tells us in the verse cited here, *Psalms* 106:23], so too, Mordechai "stood in the breach" through the power of prayer (see *Menos HaLevi* 2:5 וְהַתְּשׁוּבָה).

Moreover, the Midrash (below, 7 §14) recounts that when the decree calling for the elimination of the Jews was written in Heaven, Elijah the prophet ran to Moses and begged him to once again "stand in the breach" on behalf of the Jews. In response, Moses asked, "Is there an upright person in the generation?" When Elijah identified Mordechai, Moses told him to inform Mordechai of the decree, so that "he should pray there (on earth) and I will pray here (in heaven), and together we will beseech God for salvation." It thus emerges that Mordechai not only paralleled Moses with respect to prayer, but also partnered with him in accomplishing salvation of the Jews through prayer.

The central role prayer played in the Purim miracle is not just a historical fact. As *Rambam* writes (at the end of his enumeration of the mitzvos at the conclusion of his introduction to *Mishneh Torah*), it is also the reason for reading *Megillas Esther* on Purim: *The Sages ordained to read the Megillah in its proper time, in order to mention His praise... and to verify to future generations the truth of that which we are promised in the Torah, "For which is a great nation that has a God Who is close to it, as is HASHEM, our God, whenever we call to Him [in prayer]."* The Purim miracle showed the Jewish people and the world that even in the darkness of exile, we were God's nation, and He was ever so close to us; all we needed to do was to call out to Him.

(B) **Men of Humility — Moses and Mordechai** When linking the term *איש* stated with respect to Mordechai (אִישׁ יְהוּדִי) and the term *איש* stated

with respect to Moses, the *Midrash* specifically cites the verse וְהָאִישׁ הַזֶּה מְשֻׁחַ עֲנִי מְאֹד, *Now the man Moses was exceedingly humble*, and not one of the other verses in the Torah that refer to Moses as אִישׁ [such as וְהָאִישׁ הַזֶּה in *Exodus* 11:3, or אִישׁ הַאֲלֹהִים in *Deuteronomy* 33:1]. The Midrash is thereby alluding that these two great leaders shared the character trait of humility (*Yefeh Anaf*, cited by *Anaf Yosef*).

The Midrash then is delineating three similarities between Moses and Mordechai. Each of them was humble, each stood in the breach for his people, and each taught Torah to the Jewish people. Now, Mordechai surely had other great qualities that he shared with Moses. Why are these three traits highlighted? The answer is that the Midrash draws these three parallels between Moses and Mordechai in order to deflect the possible mistaken attribution of three ill character traits to Mordechai. Mordechai's refusal to prostrate himself before Haman (below, 3:2), the viceroy of the king, could be taken as evidence of arrogance. Furthermore, his persistent refusal to bow down to Haman could indicate that he was uncaring for the welfare of the Jewish people. Indeed, the Jews of that generation faulted Mordechai for the trouble that befell them, for it was his refusal to bow that aroused Haman's anger to the extent that he wished to obliterate the entire Jewish nation (*Megillah* 12b-13a). Finally, his eventual appointment as viceroy to Ahasuerus (below, 10:3) could lead one to suspect him of neglecting Torah study due to the duties of his office. To deflect the first two suspicions, the Midrash stresses that Mordechai was very humble, and also attentive to the plight of his people. Notwithstanding his great humility and caring nature, he had no choice but to refuse prostrating himself before Haman, because of the idol that Haman was wearing. To deflect the last complaint against Mordechai, the Midrash makes it clear that despite his position as viceroy, Mordechai disseminated Torah throughout the Jewish nation (*Yefeh Anaf*, cited by *Anaf Yosef*, and *Menos HaLevi* 2:5 ד"ה עַד בְּמִדְרַשׁ; see *Megillah* 16b and *Rashi* there מִמֶּנּוּ).

It is not coincidental that Moses and Mordechai excelled in these three areas. One who is arrogant and finds it beneath himself to deal with the "mundane" issues of the people will surely fail as a leader. Thus, it was their great humility that qualified them to be leaders of Israel (*Megillas Sesarim* 10:3). Indeed, God first appeared to Moses in a lowly bush (*Exodus* 3:2) to demonstrate that humility is an essential quality for a leader. A truly humble leader will pay attention to the physical and spiritual plight of his people. It is therefore no surprise that both Moses and Mordechai, who shared the essential trait of humility, stood in the breach to intercede on behalf of the Jews, and taught Torah to the entire nation (see *Yaaros Devash* II, *Derush* 2 s.v. אַבֵּל בְּיוֹתֵר and s.v. אַבֵּל הַעֲנִי).

"וישמו בעו" — *Naomi had a relative . . . whose name was Boaz* (Ruth 2:1); "וישמו מרדכי" — and in our verse, *There was a Jewish man . . . whose name was Mordechai*. לפי שדומין לבוראן, דבתיב — Scripture writes "whose name" first, because in this manner [the righteous] resemble their Creator of whom it is written, *but with My Name HASHEM I did not make Myself known to them* (Exodus 6:3).^[20]

□ יהודי — A JEWISH MAN WHOSE NAME WAS MORDECHAI.

The Midrash discusses the meaning of יהודי, as used in connection with Mordechai:

למה נקרא שמו יהודי, והלא ימיו הוא — Why is [Mordechai] termed *Yehudi* (literally, a *Judahite*)? Was he not a Benjamite, as stated at the end of the verse?^[21] לפי שייחד שמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא בנגוד — It is because he demonstrated the uniqueness (יהודי) of the Name of the Holy One, blessed is He, before all the inhabitants of the world.^[22] הלא הוא דבתיב "לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה" — Thus it is written, *But Mordechai would not bow and would not prostrate himself* (below, 3:2).^[23] ובי קנתרן הנה — Now was [Mordechai] a troublemaker that he should gratuitously transgress the decree of the king?^[24] אלא בשצוה אחרשורוש להשתחוות להמן חקק עבודה זרה על — Rather, when Ahasuerus commanded that all should bow down to Haman, [Haman] engraved an idol over his heart,^[25] with the intention that

[everyone] would thereby bow down to the idol. ובשקה רואה — And when Haman saw that Mordechai did not bow down to him, he was filled with wrath,^[26] ומרדכי אומר לו: יש אדון המתגאה על כל גאים, היאך אני — but Mordechai said to him, "There is a Master Who exalts Himself over all who are exalted; how can I forsake Him and bow down to an idol?"^[27] ולפי שייחד שמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא נקרא יהודי, לומר "יהודי", יחיד — And because [Mordechai] demonstrated the uniqueness of the Name of the Holy One, blessed is He, he was called *Yehudi* [יהודי], that is to say, "yehudi," meaning "unique"^[28].

The Midrash now offers a slightly different exposition: ויש אומרים שהיה שקול באברהם בדרור — And some say that Mordechai is referred to as *Yehudi* [יהודי] in the sense of "unique" because he was equivalent in his time to Abraham in his generation.^[29] מה אברהם אבינו מסר את עצמו לתורף בבשן האש — For just as our forefather Abraham gave himself over to be thrown by Nimrod into a fiery furnace rather than agree to worship idols,^[30] והחזיר והכיר לבריות גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא — and just as [Abraham] traveled around, making people aware of the greatness of the Holy One, blessed is He, הלא הוא דבתיב "ואת" — as it is written, *and the souls they made in Haran* (Genesis 12:5),^[31] אף מרדכי בימיו הכירו הבריות גדולתו — so too Mordechai, in his day people became aware of the greatness of the Holy One, blessed is He.^[32]

NOTES

20. The righteous resemble their Creator in the sense that the syntax used for them is similar to the syntax that is used (in this verse) concerning God, with the term *My Name* preceding God's actual Name. See Insight A.

21. Throughout *Esther* and the other Books of the Bible dealing with the same historical period, the term יהודי (pl., יהודים) is used to mean "Jew" (see *Rashi* on our verse). However, since it is clear from Mordechai's ancestry, as given in detail in this verse (*son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjamite*), that Mordechai was Jewish, the Midrash at this point assumes that יהודי must refer to his tribal lineage (*Eitz Yosef*).

22. Interpreting יהודי as if it were written יחיד; see below. [Mordechai demonstrated God's uniqueness by his refusal to worship idols, as the Midrash will proceed to explain.]

23. Despite Ahasuerus' command (ibid.) that all must bow and prostrate themselves before Haman.

24. Scripture gives no reason for Mordechai's refusal to bow, a refusal that resulted in the decree calling for the extermination of the Jews (see below, 3:4ff). [Although it is forbidden to bow down as an act of worship to anyone or anything other than God, it is perfectly legitimate to bow to another person as a sign of respect. See, e.g., *I Samuel* 24:8, *I Kings* 1:23.]

25. That is, he wore the graven image of an idol openly on his chest.

26. The Midrash is paraphrasing verse 3:5 below.

27. Mordechai thus made it clear why he was not bowing down to Haman. The Gemara (*Megillah* 10b) gives a similar explanation of Mordechai's actions. [*Yefeh Anaf* notes that it was because Haman specifically wanted the people bowing to him to bow to the idol that he was wearing that Mordechai refused to comply.]

28. With the ה substituting for a ח (*Matnos Kehunah, Eitz Yosef*). [Compare to *Megillah* 13a.]

29. Abraham in his day was יחיד (*unique*), a lone individual who brought the general population to an awareness of God (*Eitz Yosef*). In keeping with this understanding, *Radal* here cites the verse, *Abraham was [but] one* (*Ezekiel* 33:24).

[The current exposition, like the first one, takes איש יהודי as if it were written יחיד. It differs only in that while according to the first exposition, Mordechai is called יחיד because of his role in demonstrating God's uniqueness, according to the current exposition he is called יחיד because of his own similarity to Abraham [i.e., like Abraham, he was unique in his generation] (see *Eitz Yosef*).]

30. *Bereishis Rabbah* 38 §13 (see also *Eruvin* 53a).

31. Abraham and Sarah made souls in the sense that they converted them to faith in God (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39 §14). See also *Rambam, Hil. Avodah Zarah* 1:3.

32. That is, people became aware of God's greatness through Mordechai as they had through Abraham.

INSIGHTS

A The Placement of the Name *Michtav MeEliyahu* (Vol. 2, p. 270, apparently following *Maharal* in *Ohr Chadash* on our verse) explains in the following manner: Every person, before he is born, is assigned a unique mission as to how he is to reveal God's glory in the world. To this end, each person, to the exclusion of all others, is endowed with a tailor-made blend of abilities and talents. If he utilizes those abilities and talents in their intended way, he fulfills his mission and thereby earns his unique share in the World to Come.

Now, there is a well-established Torah concept that a name is not simply a convenient convention, but reflects the nature of each creature and its role in the total scheme of the universe (see *Rabbeinu Bachya* and *Sforno* on *Genesis* 2:19; *Berachos* 7b s.v. מנל דשמו גרים with *Maharsha*).

The righteous, who fulfill their tasks, live out, through their

unfolding lives, the potential — reflected in their names — that was assigned to them before their creation. Hence, "their name precedes them." The lives of the wicked, by contrast, are not a playing out of the assigned missions (reflected in their names), but rather an expression of their own, evil, free-will choices. Their names do not precede them.

This quality of "the name precedes" can be said of the Creator as well. For God's Names (e.g., Compassionate One, Beneficent One) are merely the manifestation, in the created world, of the qualities that God, Who is timeless and constant, possessed even before the world was created, and Who remains unchanged by their expression in the world. Thus, His Name "preceded Him." Even in how they relate to their names, then, the righteous imitate their Creator, which is, after all, the mission of their lives.

"הָרַבִּים מֵעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ מִתְיַהֲדִים" — Thus it is written, *Moreover, many from among the people of the land professed themselves Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them* (below, 8:17).^[33] וַיִּיחַד שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְקָדְשׁוֹ — And, again like Abraham, [Mordechai] demonstrated the uniqueness of the Name of the Holy One, blessed is He, and sanctified Him.^[34] וּלְפִיכֶךָ נִקְרָא יְהוּדִי, דְּכִתְיִב "אִישׁ יְהוּדִי", אֶל תִּקְרִי "יְהוּדִי" אֶלְּא — And therefore, i.e., because of his similarity to Abraham, [Mordechai] is called *yehudi*, as it is written in our verse: *There was a "yehudi" man in Shushan the capital whose name was Mordechai. Do not read it as yehudi [יְהוּדִי], but rather as if it were written yechidi [יְחִידִי], meaning "unique."*^[35]

§3 הָיָה — *THERE WAS A JEWISH MAN... WHOSE NAME WAS MORDECHAI.*

The Midrash discusses the connotation of the word הָיָה, *was*: אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן כָּל מִי שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בּוֹ "הָיָה" הוּא תְּחִלָּתוֹ וְהוּא סוּפּוֹ — R' Yochanan said: Anyone about whom [Scripture] says the word הָיָה, *was*, [that person] was the same at his start, i.e., at the beginning of his life, and at his end, i.e., till his death.^[36] אֵי תִּבְיִן — [The Sages] raised an objection to him as follows: But it is written, *Abraham "was" [but] one* (Ezekiel 33:24), and if so, according to your rule [Abraham] must have been the same, i.e., righteous, at his start and at his end!^[37]

NOTES

33. The plain meaning of *the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them* is that the people of the land feared the Jews. However, the Midrash interprets the verse as saying that *the Jews' fear of God* fell upon these people, meaning that they *too* began to fear God — a development that the Midrash attributes to Mordechai (*Eitz Yosef*; see *Yefeh Anaf* for a different explanation).

34. By refusing to bow to Haman and the idol, even at the risk of his life (*Eitz Yosef*).

35. See above, note 29.

36. If the person was righteous, it means that he was righteous throughout his *entire* lifetime, while if he was wicked, it means he was wicked

his whole life (*Eitz Yosef*), for the word הָיָה implies stability, a situation that remained constant.

Accordingly, aside from alluding to the various exemplary traits discussed in the previous section, such as Mordechai's Abraham-like singularity, our verse indicates that Mordechai maintained his righteousness constantly, throughout his entire lifetime. See Insight A.

37. The Sages here considered this obviously incorrect, for since Abraham's father, Terah, and all of the adults in his town were idolaters (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 38 §13), it may be presumed that Abraham had similarly followed that practice as a child, and only began to worship God after reaching maturity (*Eitz Yosef*).

INSIGHTS

A There Was a Jewish Man The Midrash has expounded various facets of Mordechai based on the Megillah's description of him as *There "was" a "Yehudi" "man."* He was a "man" like *the man Moses* — exceedingly humble, who stood in the breach to turn away God's wrath from upon His people and who taught them the Torah of truth. He was a *Yehudi* — a *yechidi* — singular in his time like his forefather Abraham, prepared to sacrifice his life to sanctify God's Name, who spread the knowledge of God throughout the land and brought untold numbers of his fellow men under the wings of God's presence. And he "was" that exalted *tzaddik* always — from beginning to end.

Sfas Emes expands on the latter two aspects. There are certain *tzaddikim* who, like the tree to which man is compared (*Deuteronomy* 20:19), have the power to produce seeds. There is something about them that attracts the seeking souls, whom they then plant in the world to blossom into new generations of *tzaddikim*. Thus, the verse states, *Light is sown for the righteous; and for the straightened hearts, gladness* (*Psalms* 97:11). These righteous planters have an aura — a light — that they implant in others, straightening the hearts that had hitherto been crooked and filling them with gladness. The *tzaddik* who can do this is

the quintessential *Yehudi*, the one who not only *is* a *Yehudi* but who, like Mordechai, causes many others to become *Yehudim*.

The eradication of evil in the world — the utter destruction of Amalek — however, requires not only a "man" and a "Yehudi," but one who has been this way "from beginning to end," a *tzaddik* of absolute constancy. Thus, the verse (below, 3:2) states that Mordechai "would" not bow and "would" not prostrate himself before the Amalekite Haman. He had never submitted and he never would.

The Purim celebration is a dual one. The unwallied cities celebrate it on the 14th of Adar; those in cities walled from the time of Joshua (*Megillah* 2a) culminate its celebration by observing it on the 15th. *Sfas Emes* quotes his grandfather, the *Chidushei HaRim*, as explaining that the walled cities represent those whose Torah surrounds them like an impregnable wall (see *Pesachim* 87a, *Bava Basra* 7b). Thus, the criterion of such cities is that they are walled "from the time of Joshua," who had never moved from the tent of Torah (*Exodus* 33:11) and never would (*Joshua* 1:8). It is such *tzaddikim* of absolute constancy who celebrate and can bring about the ultimate and final eradication of Amalek (see *Sfas Emes*, Vol. 8 [*Ohr Etzion* ed.] pp. 86-87, *Purim* 5658).

אמר לון אף היא לא תברא, דאמר רבי חנינא ורבי יוחנן תרויהוין: בן שלש
 שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו — [R' Yochanan] responded to [the
 Sages]: In fact, that is not a disproof of my rule, for both R'
 Chanina and R' Yochanan said, "Abraham became cognizant
 of his Creator at the age of three years,"^[38] הריא הוא דכתיב
 "עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקלי", מנין "עקב" שמע אברהם בקול בוראו, והו
 — as it is written, *Because Abraham obeyed My voice* (Genesis 26:5); the connotation of the verse is that for
 the numerical value of the word *eikev* [עקב], i.e., 172 (years),^[39]
 Abraham obeyed the voice of his Creator, and [Abraham's] years
 all together were one hundred seventy-five.^[40]

The Midrash elsewhere also records another opinion, that
 Abraham was 48 when he became cognizant of God,^[41] which
 would validate the objection of the Sages. The Midrash explains
 the implication of the word *was*, in the *Ezekiel* verse cited above ac-
 cording to that position:

— According to those who say that it was only
 as an adult that Abraham began worshipping God, how does the
 word *was*, apply regarding [Abraham]?^[42] שהיה מתווקן
 — It indicates that [Abraham] was
 predestined to lead the world in repentance.^[43]

The Midrash applies this interpretation to other instances of
 the word *was* found in Scripture, including the one in our verse:
 — In the verse, *Behold man was like the Unique One among us, knowing good and bad; and now, lest he*

put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat and live forever (Genesis 3:22), שהיה מתווקן למיתה — the word *was* indicates that [man] was predestined for death.^[44] והנהיח היה
 — In the verse, *And the serpent was more cunning* (ibid., 3:1), מתווקן לפורענות — the word *was* indicates that the snake was predestined for punishment.^[45] ויקון היה עבד ארמה
 — In the verse, *Abel was a herder of flocks, while Cain was a tiller of the ground* (ibid. 4:2), the word *was* indicates that Cain was predestined for exile, i.e., banishment from settled society,^[46] לומר נע ונד
 — as it is stated, *Cain left the presence of HASHEM and settled in nomad land* (ibid., v. 16), that is to say, Cain became a drifter and a nomad. איש היה בארץ עוץ
 — In the verse, *There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job* (Job 1:1), מתווקן
 — the word *was* indicates that Job was predestined for suffering.^[47] ינה איש צדיק תמים היה
 — In the verse, *Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God* (Genesis 6:9), היה מתווקן להפיר בוראו — the word *was* indicates that [Noah] was predestined to be cognizant of his Creator.^[48] וינשה היה רעה
 — In the verse, *Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law* (Exodus 3:1), the word *was* indicates that [Moses] was predestined for redemption.^[49] מרדכי היה מתווקן לגאולה
 — And similarly, the word *was* used in our verse regarding Mordechai indicates that he was predestined for redemption.^[50]

NOTES

38. Which would be considered the beginning of his life. [A child begins to speak coherently at age 3, and thus from that age he is considered a thinking person; see *Eitz Yosef to Bereishis Rabbah* 30 §8.]

39. $v = 70, p = 100, b = 2$.

40. *Genesis* 25:7. Since Abraham obeyed the voice of God for 172 of his 175 years of life, it follows that he began his obedience at age 3 (*Ran to Nedarim* 32a).

41. *Bereishis Rabbah* 64 §4, 95 §3, et al.

42. The text in the parallel passage in *Bereishis Rabbah* 30 §8 (see also *Bereishis Rabbah* 64 §4) reads: ר' לוי בשם ריש לקיש אמר בן שלש שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו וגו' ר' חנינא ור' יוחנן תרויהוין אמרין בן מ"ח שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו ומה אני מקיים בו היה — R' Levi said in the name of Reish Lakish: Abraham became cognizant of his Creator at the age of three years . . . Both R' Chaninah and R' Yochanan said: Abraham became cognizant of his Creator at the age of forty-eight years. And how does "was" apply regarding [Abraham] — making explicit mention of the opposing position that Abraham had been 48 years old.

Eitz Yosef, following *Yefeh Anaf*, considers our text here corrupt and emends it to conform with the text there. He notes, however, that another problem arises: According to this version of the text, the position that Abraham was 3 when he became cognizant of God is that of Reish Lakish, while R' Yochanan holds that Abraham was 48. But this is not compatible with R' Yochanan's opening statement here, according to which Abraham must have been the same at the beginning of his life as at the end! Hence, he argues that the attribution of the opening statement to R' Yochanan is also a corruption and that really it was made by some other Amora. (*Rashash to Bereishis Rabbah* 30 §8 suggests that it was R' Yonasan.)

For an alternate approach, see *Maharzu on Bereishis Rabbah* 30 §8.

43. I.e., Abraham's soul was created for the role of bringing the world back to God, which is why he was born at the particular juncture that he was, for he was thus able to rectify the errors of the previous generations and set the coming generations on the proper path of serving God; see *Bereishis Rabbah* 14 §6 (*Eitz Yosef*). According to the position that Abraham recognized his Creator at the age of 48, the word *was*, is not used in the *Ezekiel* verse to indicate constancy; rather it is used to indicate that Abraham fulfilled a role that was predetermined for him from the beginning of time.

44. That is, death was inherently part of God's plan for the world. See *Yefeh Anaf* and *Eitz Yosef*; see also *Eshed HaNechalim to Shemos Rabbah* 2 §4.

[According to the plain meaning of the verse, *was* in this context means *has become*. The Midrash, however, is understanding it in the sense of

was, and interprets the verse as: *Behold man, who was already destined to die, is, in consequence of his sin, like the Unique One among us, knowing good and bad; and now, etc.* See *Eitz Yosef*.]

45. I.e., at the time that He created the serpent, God had foreknowledge that the serpent would lead Adam and Eve to sin and would therefore be punished; see *Genesis* 3:14-15 (*Eitz Yosef*).

46. That is, God had foreknowledge that Cain would murder Abel and would therefore be sentenced to a life of wandering. [Nevertheless, He did not refrain from creating him, for God grants people free will, punishing them only when they have actually sinned.] (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*).

47. I.e., it had been God's plan from the start that Job suffer, in order to demonstrate Job's righteousness to all; or, alternatively, for the sake of the wisdom contained in Job's responses to the arguments espoused by his friends (*Eitz Yosef*).

48. That is, Noah was predestined to be as he is described in that verse: righteous, perfect, and walking with God. The text in the parallel passage in *Bereishis Rabbah* 30 §8 reads: היה מתווקן לנס — he was predestined for a miracle, and *Eitz Yosef*, following *Yefeh Anaf*, emends the text here to conform with the text there. *Eitz Yosef* explains that text to mean that Noah was inherently deserving of being saved miraculously from the Flood, and that his rescue was not merely God's best available choice ("by default") in that generation for the perpetuation of humanity. [It should be noted that the parallel text in *Shemos Rabbah* 2 §4 reads: מתווקן לגאולה — predestined for redemption.]

49. He was predestined for his role of redeeming the Israelites. *Yefeh Anaf* writes that, as with the emended text regarding Noah mentioned above, the meaning here is that Moses was inherently worthy of his role, and that he was not chosen for that role merely to fill the need of the moment as the best of the potential candidates available at the time.

50. He was predestined to be the agent for the redemption of the Jewish people from Haman's evil decree. Here too, *Yefeh Anaf* interprets this as meaning that Mordechai was inherently worthy of the role that he performed.

[Our text uses identical wording regarding both Moses and Mordechai: מתווקן לגאולה, predestined for redemption. *Eitz Yosef* notes that *Bereishis Rabbah* 30 §8 uses a slightly different wording concerning Moses: מתווקן לגואל — predestined as a redeemer. He cites *Yefeh To'ar* there who explains that the expression מתווקן לגאולה is fitting for Mordechai, since he too was included in the redemption, as he had also been subject to Haman's decree. However, for Moses, who had not been enslaved and thus was not personally a party to the redemption, the expression מתווקן לגואל, predestined as a redeemer, is more appropriate, since he was to be redeeming others but not himself.]

The Midrash now cites an alternative connotation for הָיָה and applies it to several of the examples mentioned above:

רַבִּי לֵוִי וְרַבָּנִין — R' Levi and the Rabbis each offered their own interpretations of the sense of the word הָיָה.^[51] רַבִּי לֵוִי אָמַר: כָּל מִי שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בּוֹ "הָיָה" רָאָה עוֹלָם הַדָּשׁ אִמְרוּ רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר — R' Shmuel bar Nachman said: And there were five [such individuals].^[52] נַחֲמָן: וְהַמִּשָּׁה הֵן — R' Shmuel bar Nachman lists the five and the transformations that they witnessed: (i) Noah^[54] — previously, i.e., during the Flood, he had witnessed *stones being worn away by water*,^[55] as R' Levi said in the name of R' Yochanan: "Even the stationary bottom millstone disintegrated in the waters of the Flood," וְהָבֵא — while now, i.e., after the Flood, [Scripture] says, *The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth . . . These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole world was spread out* (Genesis 9:18-19), which is to say, [Noah] saw a new world.^[56] יוֹסֵף, אֶתְמוּל "עֲנֵנוּ בְּכַבֵּל רִגְלוֹ" וְעִבְשׁוּ יוֹסֵף הוּא — (ii) Joseph^[57] — previously, they afflicted his leg with fetters (Psalms 105:18),^[58] while now, after successfully interpreting Pharaoh's dream,^[59] and Joseph, he was the ruler

over the land (Genesis 42:6)! אֵלֶּיָּהּ רָאָה עוֹלָם הַדָּשׁ — It emerges then that [Joseph] saw a new world.^[60] מִשָּׁה, אֶתְמוּל בּוֹרַחַּ מִּפְּנֵי — (iii) Moses^[61] — previously, he had been fleeing from before Pharaoh,^[62] while now, at the time of the splitting of the Reed Sea, he submerged [Pharaoh] under the sea!^[63] אֵלֶּיָּהּ שָׂרָאָה עוֹלָם הַדָּשׁ — It emerges then that [Moses] saw a new world. אוֹיֵב, אֶתְמוּל "וַיִּשְׁפֹּךְ לְאַרְצָהּ מִרְתֵּי" וְעִבְשׁוּ — (iv) Job^[64] — previously, he spilled my bile to the ground (Job 16:13),^[65] while now, after his tribulations had ended, and HASHEM added on to all that Job had had, until there was double (ibid. 42:10)! אֵלֶּיָּהּ עוֹלָם הַדָּשׁ — It emerges then that [Job] saw a new world. מְרַדְּבֵי, אֶתְמוּל "וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שָׁק וְאַפְרָ" וְעִבְשׁוּ יִצְחָק "מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלִבוֹשׁ מִלְכוּת" — (v) Mordechai — previously, when he had learned of Haman's decree, Mordechai tore his clothes and donned sackcloth and ashes (below, 4:1), while now, after Haman's downfall, Mordechai left the king's presence clad in royal apparel (below, 8:15)!^[66]

□ וְשֵׁמוֹ מְרַדְּבֵי — WHOSE NAME WAS MORDECHAI.

The Midrash explains the significance of the name Mordechai: מֵה מוֹר רֵאשׁ לְכָל הַבְּשָׂמִים — Just as myrrh (מֹר) is preeminent among all the aromatic spices,^[67] אִף מְרַדְּבֵי רֵאשׁ לְצַדִּיקִים בְּדוֹרוֹ — so too, Mordechai was preeminent among the righteous in his generation.^[68]

NOTES

51. See note 66 below.

52. That is, at some point in his lifetime he saw a transformation, either of the world in its entirety or of his own personal world. R' Levi is interpreting הָיָה in the sense of הִיָּחַד, "existence," with הָיָה thus indicating that the person experienced a new existence (*Eitz Yosef*).

53. Although Scripture uses the word הָיָה, *was*, regarding many individuals, according to R' Shmuel bar Nachman it is only in regard to the five people whom he is about to enumerate that the word is indicative of their having seen a new world. See *Yefeh Anaf*.

54. Regarding whom Scripture uses the word הָיָה in Genesis 6:9, as noted above.

55. As a poetic style, the Midrash here cites a phrase from Job 14:19 to describe a phenomenon that occurred at the time of the Flood. The verse itself is not discussing the Flood.

56. That is, Noah saw the repopulating of the world after the total destruction wrought by the Flood. See, *Tanchuma, Noach* #2.

57. Scripture uses the word הָיָה regarding Joseph in the verse, וַיִּוָּסֵף יוֹסֵף בְּמִצְרַיִם, and Joseph was in Egypt (Exodus 1:5).

58. This verse is describing Joseph's condition during his imprisonment; see Genesis 39:20.

59. See *ibid.* 41:14-37.

60. I.e., Joseph's situation underwent a total transformation. *Eitz Yosef* writes that the Midrash refers to such a transformation as "a new world" because when things are going well for a person he views the entire world as bright and good, and when things are not going well for him he views the entire world as dark and bad.

61. See above, note 52.

62. When, as a young man in the household of Pharaoh, Moses had killed an Egyptian for striking an Israelite slave; see *Exodus* 2:11-15.

63. *Ibid.* 14:26-28.

64. See above, note 52.

65. As Job poetically describes the suffering that Satan had inflicted upon him.

66. Thus, Mordechai too experienced a complete transformation of his situation. *Eitz Yosef*, citing *Os Emes*, emends the text so that here also the Midrash concludes: אֵלֶּיָּהּ שָׂרָאָה עוֹלָם הַדָּשׁ, rather, it is that he saw a new world.

[The text in our passage is missing the Rabbis' interpretation of הָיָה. However, in the parallel passage in *Bereishis Rabbah* 30 §8 it is given as: רַבָּנִין אָמְרִין כָּל מִי שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בּוֹ "הָיָה" זָן וּמִפְּרִיָּם — The Rabbis said, "Anyone about whom [Scripture] says, *was* [הָיָה], sustained and provided (for others)." The Midrash there proceeds to explain the examples mentioned above in accordance with the Rabbis' understanding.]

67. See *Exodus* 30:23 — וְאַתָּה קַח לָךְ בְּשָׂמִים רֵאשׁ מִרְדּוֹר חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת, Now take for yourself preeminent spices: five hundred shekel-weights of pure myrrh. [Myrrh, listed first, is assumed to be the most precious of all the spices.]

68. Similarly, the Talmud finds an allusion to מְרַדְּבֵי in the Aramaic translation of the phrase מֹר דְּרֹדֵר, pure myrrh — מְרִי דְּבֵי (*Megillah* 10b).

[*Eitz Yosef* notes that it is common for the Sages to interpret a person's name in a manner that is appropriate for his character. See *Berachos* 7b.]

אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִם הַגְּלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָהּ עִם יְכִנְיָהּ
מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל.
Who had been exiled from Jerusalem along with the
exiles who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of
Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had
exiled (2:6).

§4 אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם — WHO HAD BEEN EXILED FROM
JERUSALEM . . .

The Midrash relates a practice of the Sages concerning this
verse:

ר' בִּרְכַיָּהוּ וְר' יִרְמְיָהוּ וְר' חִיָּיָה בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יוֹסֵי
— R' Berechyah and R' Yirmiyah and R' Chiya said in the name of R' Yose: כֹּד
— הוּוּ מְטִי רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן וְרַבִּי לְהַאֲרִי פְסוּקָא "אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר"
— When R' Yonasan and the Rabbis would reach this verse, whom
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had exiled, הוּוּ אָמְרִין
— they would say, "Nebuchadnezzar!
may his bones disintegrate!"^[69] וְלָמְדָה לֹא הוּוּ אָמְרִין כֵּן בִּירְמְיָהוּ
— And why is it that they did not say the same when reading
Nebuchadnezzar's name in the Book of *Jeremiah*?^[70] אֲלָא שְׂבָל
— Rather, each mention
of Nebuchadnezzar that is found in *Jeremiah* is at a point in the
narrative when he was still alive;^[71] however, the verse here is
discussing a time when [Nebuchadnezzar] was already dead.^[72]

וַיְהִי אִמֵּן אֶת הַדְּרָסָה הַיָּא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת דָּוִד כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וְאֵם
וְהַנְּעִרָה יַפְתָּה הָאָר וְטוֹבַת מְרָאָה וְכַמּוֹת אֲבִיהָ וְאֵמָה לְקַחָהּ
מְרַדְכַי לֹו לְבַת.

And he had reared Hadassah, she is Esther, his uncle's
daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The
maiden was finely featured and beautiful of appearance,
and when her father and mother had died, Mordechai
adopted her as [his] daughter (2:7).

§5 וַיְהִי אִמֵּן אֶת הַדְּרָסָה — AND HE HAD REARED HADASSAH, SHE
IS ESTHER.

Why does our verse call Esther "Hadassah"? The Midrash
explains:^[73]

מָה הַדְּרָסָה רִיחָהּ מְתוּקָה וְטַעְמָה מֵר
(הַדְּרָסָה) — Just like in regard to the myrtle
plant, its fragrance is sweet but its taste is bitter,^[74]
כֵּן הָיְתָה אֶסְתֵּר מְתוּקָה לְמְרַדְכַי וְמַרָה לְהַמָּן
— so too, Esther was
sweet for Mordechai but bitter for Haman.^[75]

כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וְאֵם — FOR SHE HAD NEITHER FATHER NOR
MOTHER.

With the exceptions of Adam and Eve, every human be-
ing has had a father and a mother. The Midrash explains this
phrase:

ר' פִּינְחָס וְר' חַמָּא בְּר' גּוּרִיּוֹן בְּשֵׁם רַב
— R' Pinchas and R' Chama bar Gurion said in the name of Rav:
וְכִי שְׂתוּקִית הָיְתָה דָּאָתָּה — Was [Esther] a foundling^[76] that
you should say regarding her, for she had neither father nor
mother?^[77] אֲלָא עִבְרָתָהּ אֵמָה מֵת אֲבִיהָ, וְכִינָן שְׂנוּלְדָה מֵתָה אֵמָה
— Rather, the phrase indicates that when her mother conceived
her, her father died, and as soon as she had been born, her
mother died.^[78]

NOTES

69. Although he was long dead, at the mention of the name of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar these Sages cursed him that the bones of his skeleton should decay in the grave. They did this in fulfillment of the verse, וְשֵׁם רָשָׁעִים יִרָקַב, but the name of the wicked will rot (*Proverbs* 10:7); see *Bereishis Rabbah* 49 §1.

70. Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned fairly frequently in *Jeremiah*, which deals with the period of the Babylonian conquest of the Kingdom of Judah and the destruction of the First Temple at their hands. See below.

71. Since the events described in *Jeremiah* occurred during the lifetime of Nebuchadnezzar, to have interjected the curse, "May his bones disintegrate" (a curse that refers to a corpse), in the middle of reading the text would have seemed somewhat anachronistic, even though Nebuchadnezzar was no longer alive at the time the text was read. [And to use a different curse, one appropriate for someone who is still alive, would also have been inappropriate since in reality he was already dead] (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*; see *Matnos Kehunah* for an alternative explanation).

72. Although our verse mentions an event that occurred during Nebuchadnezzar's lifetime, viz., Mordechai's having been exiled by Nebuchadnezzar from Jerusalem along with King Jeconiah (see preceding note), its setting is a time 70 years later, after the death of Nebuchadnezzar and the fall of his dynasty, when the Babylonian Empire had already been supplanted by the Persians (see *Megillah* 11b).

73. The issue of which of the two names (Hadassah or Esther) was her

real name is the subject of a dispute between the Sages in *Megillah* 13a. The Midrash here considers Esther to have been her real name, and offers an explanation as to why Scripture also refers to her as Hadassah (*Eitz Yosef*).

74. The taste of the myrtle leaf is extremely bitter.

75. That is, Esther is called הַדְּרָסָה, myrtle, because she possessed the characteristic of the myrtle of being simultaneously sweet and bitter. See Insight (A). [See *Megillah* 13a for alternative explanations of the connotation of this name.]

76. The word used by the Midrash, שְׂתוּקִית, technically means one whose mother is clearly identified but whose father is unknown; see *Kiddushin* 69a. However, it is clear from the context that here it is being used in the sense of a foundling whose parentage is entirely unknown.

77. The phrase clearly does not mean simply that her parents had died, for their death is mentioned explicitly further on in the verse ("when her father and mother had died"). The Midrash is saying here that had Esther been a foundling, the phrase could have been taken to mean that she was without any identifiable mother or father, live or dead. [But in truth she was not a foundling, for the verse identifies her as Mordechai's uncle's daughter.] (*Eitz Yosef*; see also *Megillah* 13a).

78. Thus, from the earliest moment that he could have been called her father, he was already deceased; and from the earliest moment that her mother could have been called her mother, she was already deceased. Thus, in effect, Esther never had any parents (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Rashi* to *Megillah* 13a).

INSIGHTS

(A) **Appropriate Response** This Midrash, say *Megillas Sesarim* and *Torah Temimah* (to this verse), is a lesson in the importance of balancing one's character traits. Some people are naturally kindhearted, so kindness is always their response to every state of affairs, even where kindness is not appropriate. This is incorrect. We are obligated to serve God with all our faculties and with all our potential. This means that when necessary, one must be prepared to override his natural inclination. Otherwise, one is in effect serving his own nature rather than the will of God. And failing to override one's nature when called upon to do so can have serious consequences. For example, King Saul was swayed

by his attribute of kindness to spare the life of the wicked Agag. The results were catastrophic. Amalek was reborn, and Saul was removed from the kingship (*I Samuel* Ch. 15).

The Midrash learns from Esther's name Hadassah that she (Saul's descendant, who was rectifying his error in her response to Agag's descendant Haman) was a master in this delicate act of balance. Where events called for sweetness, she responded accordingly. Where what was called for was harshness toward Haman, she rose to the occasion, exhibiting no mercy toward the ashen-faced mortal enemy of Israel as she denounced him to the king.

וּבְכֵל יוֹם וְיוֹם מְרַדְכֵי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֹצֵר בֵּית הַנְּשִׂיִם לְרַעַת
 אֶת שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וּמָה יַעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ.
*Day after day Mordechai would walk about in front of
 the courtyard of the harem to learn about Esther's well-
 being and what would become of her (2:11).*

§6^[79] Citing a verse from *Exodus*, the Midrash begins a discussion of a group of Biblical figures, including Mordechai: "וְיָשִׁים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ" — It is written, Write this as a remembrance in the Book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I shall surely erase the memory of Amalek from under the heavens (*Exodus* 17:14). זֶה אֶחָד מֵאַרְבָּעָה צְדִיקִים שְׁנִיתָן לָהֶם רְמֹו — Moses, to whom this verse was addressed, is one of four righteous individuals to whom [God] gave indications concerning the future.^[80] שְׁנַיִם חִשּׁוּ וּשְׁנַיִם לֹא חִשּׁוּ — Of those four, two of them heeded the indications,^[81] and two of them did not heed. מֹשֶׁה — Moses was given an indication of what was to occur later, but he did not heed the indication. יַעֲקֹב נִתָּן לוֹ — Jacob was given such an indication, but he too did not heed it. דָּוִד וּמְרַדְכֵי נִתָּן לָהֶם רְמֹו וְחִשּׁוּ — However, David and Mordechai were each given an indication of the future and they did heed them.

The Midrash elaborates first in regard to Jacob and Moses who failed to heed their Divinely given messages:
 — יַעֲקֹב אָמַר לַיהוָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: "וַיִּשְׁמְרֵתִיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ", "וַיִּוִּיֵרָא" — Jacob — the Holy One, blessed is He, had said to him, "Behold, I am with you; and I will guard you wherever you go, and I will return you to this soil" (*Genesis* 28:15), and yet [Jacob] became very frightened (*ibid.* 32:8).^[82] אֵדָם שֶׁהִבְטִיחוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא — Now, can it be that a person whom the Holy One, blessed is He, had assured him of His protection would be afraid, as is written concerning Jacob: *Jacob became very frightened, and it distressed him?* אֵלָּא אָמַר שְׁמֹוֹ

— Rather, this is what [Jacob] said: "Perhaps when I was in the house of Laban the contaminated one, I became sullied with contamination."^[83] מֹשֶׁה, "וְיָשִׁים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ" לֹמַר שְׁאֵתָּה מֵת וַיהוֹשֻׁעַ מִכְּנִיס יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֶרֶץ — Moses — God told him, "and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I shall surely erase the memory of Amalek" (*Exodus* 17:14), so as to say that you, Moses, will die, and Joshua will bring the people of Israel into the land of Canaan,^[84] וּבְתֵיב "וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֵל" — and yet it is written concerning Moses: *I implored HASHEM at that time . . . Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan* (*Deuteronomy* 3:23-25).^[85]

The Midrash discusses David and Mordechai and their proper understanding of the indications given to them:

— דָּוִד וּמְרַדְכֵי נִתָּן לָהֶם רְמֹו וְחִשּׁוּ — David and Mordechai were each given an indication of the future and they did heed them. דָּוִד אָמַר לְמֶלֶךְ שָׁאוּל — David said to King Saul, "Your servant has slain even lion and bear" (*I Samuel* 17:36).^[86] — דָּוִד אָמַר דָּוִד וְכִי מָה אֲנִי סָפוֹן שֶׁהִבְטִיחֵי חַיּוֹת רְעוּת אֵלַי אֵלָּא אָמַר שְׁמֹוֹ דָּבָר עֲתִיד לִיאָרֵעַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהֵן — Rather than attributing it to his personal merit, [David] said, "Perhaps it is a sign that some threatening occurrence is destined to befall Israel, and they will be saved through me."^[87] מְרַדְכֵי יוֹם וְיוֹם מְרַדְכֵי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֹצֵר בֵּית — Mordechai — The verse here states, *Day after day Mordechai would walk about in front of the courtyard of the harem to learn about Esther's well-being and what would become of her.*^[88] — אָמַר: אֶפְשָׁר לְצַדִּיקָהּ וְאֵת שְׁתַּנְּשָׂא לְעָרֵל — [Mordechai] said: Is it possible that God would have allowed this righteous woman to be wed to one uncircumcised?^[89] אֵלָּא שְׁעֲתִיד דָּבָר — Rather, it must be that some great and terrible occurrence is destined to befall Israel, and they will be saved through [Esther].^[91]

NOTES

79. It should be noted that §7 below returns to discussing v. 7, discussed in §5 above. *Eitz Yosef*, following *Yefeh Anaf*, argues therefore that our text is out of order and suggests that this section (§6) be placed after §7.

80. That is, this command to Moses contained a subtle indication about some future event, as the Midrash proceeds to explain.

81. They based their subsequent behavior upon the indication that God had given them.

82. When told that Esau was approaching him with four hundred men (*Genesis* 32:7-8).

83. Perhaps, while living with Laban, I have been subtly corrupted by his sinful ways and I am no longer worthy of God's promised protection.

Yefeh Anaf, *Anaf Yosef*, and others explain that the Midrash means that Jacob's fears that he may have been influenced by Laban were misplaced. God's double promise, "וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ וַיִּשְׁמְרֵתִיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ", "Behold, I am with you; and I will guard you wherever you go," indicated that God would be with him, protecting him from physical dangers, and also that He would guard Jacob from the evil inclination wherever Jacob would go, even in the house of the wicked Laban. Jacob, however, "did not heed this indication," i.e., he did not comprehend that God had promised protection against sin, and hence he became very frightened.

84. Therefore it would be Joshua's responsibility to instruct the Israelites to wipe out the memory of Amalek.

85. Moses thought that it was only God's decree following his sin at the Waters of Strife that was preventing him from entering the Land (see *Numbers* 20:7-12), and that he could therefore have the decree rescinded through repentance and prayer. Moses did not realize that this verse (*Exodus* 17:14) indicates that there was a preexisting Divine decree, even prior to his sin. Furthermore, the verse in fact names Joshua as his successor, as the one to lead the Israelites into the Land. Thus, although the decree was to Moses' detriment, it was to Joshua's benefit. [For Joshua to assume the leadership would require the demise of Moses; see *Devarim Rabbah* 9 §9.] As such it was unalterable, for God does not reverse a decree that is beneficial to someone, on account

of another's prayer and/or repentance. See *Yefeh Anaf* and *Anaf Yosef*.

86. David was arguing that he would be able to fight and to defeat Goliath.

87. I.e., would God perform such a great miracle merely on my behalf. David was saying that if God had wanted merely to save him, he could have enabled him to frighten the beasts away. He did not need to have supernaturally given him the strength to actually kill the animals (*Eitz Yosef*).

88. That is, God has enabled me to slay these beasts as an omen, to inspire me to be able to defeat Israel's enemies in the future (*ibid.*). Thus, when the danger now arose in the form of Goliath, David was convinced that God would likewise enable him to slay the Philistine giant.

89. To learn about Esther's well-being would mean that Mordechai took these walks to monitor Esther's personal safety (see §8 below), but it is not clear what additional purpose is implied by the phrase *what would become of her*. Surely Mordechai was well aware of the purpose for which she had been taken to the king's harem, and did not need these daily walks to discover what the chamberlains intended for her! The Midrash proceeds to explain the connotation of that seemingly superfluous phrase (see *Eitz Yosef* and *Yefeh Anaf*).

90. I.e., to be impressed into Ahasuerus' harem as one of his wives.

91. God must be positioning Esther in close proximity to the king so that she will be able to influence him on behalf of the Jews. Thus, Mordechai set out on his daily walks in front of the harem to discover if Esther already had a sense of some impending danger threatening the Jews that would require her intervention (*Eitz Yosef*). Although in fact the danger was not to come until more than five years later, our verse shows that Mordechai properly interpreted the indication that God had given him concerning Esther. Alternatively, Mordechai realized that to ultimately be able to save the Jewish people, Esther would have to be more prominent than just being one of the members of the king's harem. He thus sought to know *what would become of her*, i.e., in what important position she would be placed (*Yefeh Anaf*, final explanation; see also *Rashi* to our verse).

§7 The Midrash notes the significance of Esther having been orphaned.^[92]

ר' ברכייה בשם רבי לוי: אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל אתם בכיתם ואמרם "יתומים" — אתם בכיתם ואמרם "יתומים" — "You cried in despair and said, 'We have become orphans, and there is no father' (Lamentations 5:3).^[93] חייבם — By your lives!^[94] The savior^[95] whom I will ultimately set up for you in Persia/Media will have neither a father nor a mother."^[96] — Thus it is written: for she had neither father nor mother (above, v. 7).^[97]

§8 וּבְכֹל יוֹם מְרַדְּכֵי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֲצַר בֵּית הַנְּשִׂימִים — DAY AFTER DAY MORDECHAI WOULD WALK ABOUT IN FRONT OF THE COURTYARD OF THE HAREM.

The Midrash explains the connotation here of the term, חֲצַר בֵּית הַנְּשִׂימִים (lit., the women's house).^[98]

לְשֹׂאֵל עַל בְּתֻמָּה וְעַל נְדוּתָהּ — This means that Mordechai would use

these walks to inquire regarding her blood stains and regarding her menstrual blood.^[99]

□ לְדַעַת אֶת שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר — TO LEARN ABOUT ESTHER'S WELL-BEING.

The Midrash explains what potential danger to Esther's well-being Mordechai was concerned about:

שָׁלָא יַעֲשׂוּ לָהּ בְּשִׂפִים — Mordechai sought to ascertain that [the other women] who had been brought to the king's harem would not perform sorcery against [Esther].^[100]

The Midrash finds a parallel between Mordechai's present behavior and that recorded at the end of *Esther*:

אָמַר רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב בַּר אַחָא: אָמַר לֹו הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: אֲתָה דְרַשְׁתָּ שְׁלוֹם נַפְשָׁא — R' Yaakov bar Acha said: The Holy One, blessed is He, said to [Mordechai], "You have sought the well-being of one individual person," "לְדַעַת אֶת שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר" — as our verse states, to learn about Esther's well-being.^[101] חַיִּיךָ סוּפֵךְ לְדַרוּשׁ — "By your life! You will ultimately seek the well-being of an entire nation."^[102]

NOTES

92. Above, v. 7. [See note 79 above.]

93. The verse is expressing the anguish of the Jews at the time of the Babylonians' conquest of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple.

94. A form of an oath.

95. Referring to Esther.

96. Israel's cry, "We have become orphans," indicated that they felt helpless without a physical father. To demonstrate that even without an earthly father the Jews can always rely on their Father in Heaven, God gave them a savior who likewise lacked physical parents but nevertheless, with God's help, had reached such an exalted stature that she was able to save the Jewish nation (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*). Alternatively, by crying, "We have become orphans, and there is no father," the Jews meant that they had been abandoned by God, their Father in Heaven. When God brought about their salvation through Esther who had no physical parents, but despite that had been nurtured by Him and raised to the position of queen, He showed that a Jew is never orphaned from God (*Yefeh Anaf*, second explanation). [For another explanation as to why the salvation of the Jewish people was brought about through an orphan, see Insight (A).]

97. *Eitz Yosef*, following *Yefeh Anaf*, suggests that R' Berechyah is explaining the need for this phrase, given that the verse there also states, her father and mother had died. See above, note 77.

98. This phrase is seemingly superfluous; the sense of the verse would have been the same had it stated: *Mordechai would inquire about Esther's well-being* (*Eitz Yosef*) or, *Mordechai would go to learn about Esther's well-being* (*Yefeh Anaf*).

99. Mordechai would examine any bloodstains on her clothing or any actual discharges of blood she had had in order to determine whether

halachically they would render her a *niddah* (menstruant), which would prohibit her from engaging in relations. The Midrash is thus interpreting *בֵּית הַנְּשִׂימִים* as a euphemistic reference to the womanly discharge (*Eitz Yosef*; however, see *Maharzu* and *Radal*). *Megillah* 13b offers a similar exposition, based on the verse, וְזֹאת מֵאִמֵּר מְרַדְּכֵי אֶסְתֵּר עֲשֵׂה, for *Esther continued to obey Mordechai* (below, v. 20). [Although relations with the king would have been forbidden in any event, Esther was unable to avoid them entirely. Instead, she sought to minimize the prohibitions she would be forced to violate by attempting to abstain from such relations when she was a menstruant (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Menos HaLevi*).] (For another approach, see *Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*, and *Maharsha* to *Megillah* 13b s.v. באשר דיתה באמנה.)

100. The other women were jealous of the attention that Hegai was showing Esther (see above, v. 9) and they sought to harm her through sorcery. Mordechai's constant monitoring of Esther enabled him to counter these attempts (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Menos HaLevi*; *Maharzu*). [See *Midrash Shochoh Tov* (to Psalm 22), which recounts another instance in which sorcery was used against Esther. For an alternative understanding of our passage, see *Yefeh Anaf*.]

101. Which Mordechai did despite the risk it involved. As mentioned above, Esther was being threatened by sorcery; Mordechai's efforts at protecting her put him in danger of being similarly targeted. See *Eitz Yosef*.

102. Through his selfless behavior on behalf of Esther, Mordechai merited being raised to the position where he would be able to protect the welfare of the entire Jewish nation. This serves to illustrate the principle that *שְׂכָר מִצְוָה מְצוּה מְצוּה*, "the reward for a commandment is another commandment" (*Avos* 4:2), meaning that the one who properly fulfills a commandment is rewarded by being granted the opportunity to fulfill even more commandments (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Menos HaLevi*). See Insight (B).

INSIGHTS

(A) **The Orphan Savior** R' Yonasan Eibeshutz in *Yaaros Devash* offers a different explanation as to why it had to be specifically an orphan who was to save Israel from Haman and his evil decree. Haman was a descendant of Israel's archenemy Amalek (above, *Pesichta* §7 et al.) and thus a descendant of Esau. Although Esau was generally sinful, he was meticulous in regard to the commandment of honoring one's parents, so much so that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel found his own service of his father lacking when compared to that of Esau for Isaac (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 65 §16).

The Talmud notes that honoring one's parents properly is so difficult that "happy is the one who never saw them" (*Kiddushin* 31b), for only such a person can avoid being deficient in fulfilling his obligations. Haman, then, was armed with an extremely powerful weapon in his battle against the Jews: the merit of his ancestor Esau, who had properly fulfilled the commandment of honoring his father. (In contrast to Esau, Jacob was punished for his failure to properly honor his parents; see *Megillah* 16b-17a.) Accordingly, it required specifically an orphan such as Esther, who had never seen her parents (above, §5) and

thus could not be deficient in fulfillment of this mitzvah, to be able to defeat Haman (*Yaaros Devash*, Section 2, *Derash* 2, cited here in *Anaf Yosef*).

(B) **To Save a Single Soul** That the Midrash should see such significance in Mordechai's devotion to Esther's well-being seems puzzling. After all, he had raised her as his own daughter (above, verse 6). And according to the Gemara (*Megillah* 13a), she was even his wife! Wouldn't any father or husband show similar devotion? Does exhibiting that natural, universal impulse qualify a person to lead the entire nation?

But the precise language of the Midrash holds the key. The Midrash states — and thus teaches us — that Mordechai's concern for and devotion to the welfare of Esther was prompted first and foremost by his concern for "the welfare of a single person." It was not the captivity of his daughter or wife that was uppermost in his mind. It was that a *single soul* was in distress. Mordechai's love for a fellow Jew was profound. He would have done the same for a total stranger. His natural, personal feelings for himself and his own were eclipsed by his devotion to any and every Jew. This indeed is the hallmark of a true Jewish leader.

“הָדָא הוּא דְכִתִּיב ”דִּרְשׁ טוֹב לְעַמּוֹ וְדַבֵּר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל יִרְעוּ” — Thus it is written concerning Mordechai: *He sought the good of his people and spoke for the welfare of all its seed* (below, 10:3).

וּבְהִגִּיעַ תֵּר אֶסְתֵּר בַּת אֲבִיחַיִל הִד מְרֻדְכֵי אֲשֶׁר לָקַח לֹו לְבַת לָבוֹא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא בְקִשָּׁה דְּבָר כִּי אִם אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֵר הַגִּי טָרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁמֵר הַנְּשִׂיִם וְתִהְיֶי אֶסְתֵּר נִשְׂאֵת חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָל רְאִיָּה.

Now when the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail uncle of Mordechai (who had adopted her as [his] daughter) to come to the king, she requested nothing except that which Hegai, the king's chamberlain, guardian of the women, had advised. Esther would find favor in the eyes of all who saw her (2:15).

§9 וּבְהִגִּיעַ תֵּר אֶסְתֵּר וְגו' וְתִהְיֶי אֶסְתֵּר נִשְׂאֵת חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָל רְאִיָּה
— NOW WHEN THE TURN CAME FOR ESTHER... TO COME TO THE KING, SHE REQUESTED NOTHING EXCEPT THAT WHICH HEGAI, THE KING'S CHAMBERLAIN, GUARDIAN OF THE WOMEN,

HAD ADVISED. ESTHER WOULD FIND FAVOR IN THE EYES OF ALL WHO SAW HER.

The Midrash discusses the implication of רְאִיָּה כָל, *the eyes of all who saw her*:

רַבִּי יוּדָא אָמַר: בְּאִיקוּנִין הָיָה שְׂאֵלָף בְּנֵי אָדָם מִבֵּיטִים בָּהּ וְהוּא עֲרִיבָה עַל כּוֹלָם — R' Yuda says: Esther was like an artistic image of a person, which a thousand people gaze upon and it is pleasant for all.^[103]

רַבִּי נְחֵמְיָה אָמַר: הֶעֱמִידוּ מְדִינַת מִכְּאֵן וּפְרָסִיּוֹת מִכְּאֵן וְהִיָּתָה אֶסְתֵּר יָפָה מִכּוֹלָן — R' Nechemyah says: They placed Median women on this side of Esther, and Persian women on that side, and Esther was found to be fairer than any of them.^[104]

וְרַבְנֵי אַמְרִין: "וְתִהְיֶי אֶסְתֵּר נִשְׂאֵת חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָל רְאִיָּה", בְּעֵינֵי הָעֲלִיּוֹנִים וּבְעֵינֵי הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים — The Rabbis say: *Esther would find favor in the eyes of all who saw her*, meaning both in the eyes of the inhabitants of the upper realms^[105] and in the eyes of the inhabitants of the lower realms,^[106]

בְּמֵא דְאֵת אָמַר "וּמִצָּא חֵן" — as it is stated, *and you will find favor and goodly wisdom in the eyes of God and man* (Proverbs 3:4).^[107]

NOTES

103. An artificial image can be painted as a composite of many attractive features and is therefore found aesthetically pleasing by many people with different tastes. However, a real person normally has several more attractive features and several less attractive ones. Furthermore, a real person's appearance will vary depending on his/her physical and emotional state, while an attractive artificial image will appear pleasant whenever it is viewed. Although she was a real person, Esther possessed "picture-perfect" beauty, and was found attractive by all people at all times (*Radal*; see *Matnos Kehunah* and *Eitz Yosef* for a different explanation).

104. Interpreting רְאִיָּה כָל as *relative to the appearance of all those seen with her* (*Eitz Yosef*). Alternatively, R' Nechemyah means that both

nations had to acknowledge her beauty, since it was obvious when she was compared to her rivals from either nation; cf. R' Elazar's interpretation of this verse in *Megillah Ta*.

105. I.e., God and the heavenly angels.

106. I.e., humans. Thus, according to the Rabbis the *favor* mentioned in our verse does not refer [only] to her physical attractiveness but [also] to her exemplary character traits and proper attitude, which impressed the heavenly beings (*Eitz Yosef*). See Insight A.

107. The Rabbis are reasoning that just as the verse in *Proverbs* speaks of finding favor in the eyes of God and man, so too in our verse, "find favor" means in the eyes of God and man.

INSIGHTS

This is what qualified Mordechai to lead the entire nation (*R' Nossan Wachtfogel, Kovetz Sichos* 5739, p. 111).

Sfas Emes (Vol. 2, p. 180, Purim 5637) makes a fascinating connection: "Each and every day" Mordechai would attend to the needs of the suffering orphan girl held against her will in the palace of a non-Jewish king. Each and every day for a period of five years! [Esther was taken to the palace in the seventh year of Ahasuerus' reign (2:16) and Mordechai's elevation to viceroy occurred in the twelfth year.] And "each and every day" he would resist the wicked Haman and refuse to bow (below, 3:5). Whatever is mentioned in the *Megillah* was an essential component of the miracle. Because of the righteous Mordechai's unremitting devotion to a single Jew, he merited that his unremitting struggle against the mortal enemy of the Jews would be crowned with miraculous victory. Mordechai combined in his person the dual qualities of unceasing devotion to others and unceasing strength of conviction. He would be the one to lead the entire nation, the *great man among the Jews* who, as the *Megillah* concludes, *sought the good of his people and spoke for the welfare of all its seed*.

Ⓐ **True Beauty** The Midrash does not mean to tell us merely how at this point in the narrative Esther was looked upon in Heaven. Its focus is upon how she was viewed by all who surrounded her in the palace: She found favor in the eyes of all of them, without exception. But how was this so? She had eschewed all cosmetics beyond those mandated

by the royal beauticians. And far from being a radiant and eager contestant, she was beset with worry over her sorrowful predicament. All this should have conspired to diminish her appeal. Yet the opposite was true. Esther "found favor in the eyes of all who saw her" — and the Midrash tells us why: It was *because* of her favor in the eyes of the Upper World that she captivated the coarser eyes of mortals. It was precisely *because* of her modesty and *because* of her irreproachable behavior that she appealed to all who saw her. The favor she found in the Heavenly realm caused grace to descend upon her in this realm. She found favor in the eyes of all who beheld her, even if they did not know the source of that favor.

And without Divine favor — and certainly with Divine disfavor — even the most exceptional beauty can lose its luster. Vashti was renowned for her beauty; her drunken husband sought to put it on public display. But she was evil and vain. She had debased and oppressed her Jewish maidservants (*Megillah* 12b). She had earned the displeasure of the upper realms, and this colored her appearance here on earth. She lost her appeal to the king, who decreed an end to her, and her physical beauty could do nothing to restore that appeal.

Thus, King Solomon says in *Proverbs* (31:30): *Grace is false, and beauty vain; a woman who fears HASHEM, she shall be praised*. Without fear of God, beauty is false and vain. But the woman who fears God shall be praised *even for her beauty*, a beauty endowed with grace from Heaven (based on *R' Elisha Galiko*, commentary to our verse).

וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחְשֵׁרוּשׁ אֶל בֵּית מְלָכוֹתוֹ בְּחֹדֶשׁ
הָעֵשְׂרִי הוּא חֹדֶשׁ טֵבַת בְּשָׁנַת שְׁבַע לְמְלָכוֹתוֹ.
Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Teves, in the seventh year of his reign (2:16).

§10 וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחְשֵׁרוּשׁ — *ESTHER WAS TAKEN TO KING AHASUERUS.*

The term לְקַיְחָה, *taking*, usually refers to physically carrying or pulling something by hand, a method not normally employed with people and presumably not what was done to Esther. The Midrash explains the connotation here of וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר, *Esther was taken*.^[108] מִתְעַלָּה בְּלִקְוִיחוֹן — This means that [Esther] was appraised as if by would-be purchasers.^[109] דִּין אָמַר: אֲנִי יְהִיב מָאָה דִּינָרִין וְעֵלִיל — This courtier said, “I will give one hundred dinar and enter into the king’s presence together with her,” וְדִין אָמַר אֲנִי — and that one said, “I will give two hundred dinar and enter together with her.”^[110]

וַיֵּאָהֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל הַנְּשִׂימִים וְהָשָׂא חֵן וְחֶסֶד לְפָנָיו
מִכָּל הַבְּתוּלוֹת וַיִּשָּׂם כִּתָּר מְלָכוֹת בְּרֵאשִׁית וַיִּמְלִיכָהּ תַּחַת
וְשָׂתִי.

The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found more favor and kindness before him than all the other maidens; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen in place of Vashti (2:17).

§11 וַיֵּאָהֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל הַנְּשִׂימִים וְהָשָׂא חֵן וְחֶסֶד וְגוֹ' —
THE KING LOVED ESTHER MORE THAN ALL THE WOMEN, AND SHE FOUND MORE FAVOR AND KINDNESS BEFORE HIM THAN ALL THE OTHER MAIDENS.

Scripture’s description of the king’s preference for Esther over

her rivals appears repetitive. The Midrash explains the implication of these two clauses:

— R’ Chelbo said: מְלִמְד שְׂאָף הַנְּשׂוּאוֹת הַבִּיאוּ לְפָנָיו [The verse] indicates that even married women were brought before [Ahasuerus].^[111] לָכֵן נֶאֱמַר “מִכָּל הַנְּשִׂימִים” וְיִמְלִיכָהּ הַבְּתוּלוֹת — Therefore it states first, *more than all the women*, and then, *more favor and kindness . . . than all the other maidens*.^[112]

וַיִּשָּׂם כִּתָּר מְלָכוֹת בְּרֵאשִׁית וַיִּמְלִיכָהּ תַּחַת וְשָׂתִי — *SO THAT HE SET THE ROYAL CROWN UPON HER HEAD, AND MADE HER QUEEN IN PLACE OF VASHTI.*

The Midrash discusses the sense in which Esther replaced Vashti:

— Until [Ahasuerus] had made Esther queen, the portrait of Vashti had remained in its former location,^[113] בֵּינוֹן שְׂנֵאָשָׁא אֶת אֶסְתֵּר בֵּת — but once he married Esther, the daughter of aristocrats, the daughter of nobility,^[114] [Ahasuerus] said, “Let Vashti be taken down, and let Esther be elevated.”^[115] — הָדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב “וַיִּמְלִיכָהּ תַּחַת וְשָׂתִי” — Thus it is written, *and made her queen in place of Vashti*.^[116]

אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מְגִדַּת מוֹלְדָתָהּ וְאֵת עַמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עֲלֶיהָ מְרֻדְכָי
וְאֵת מְאֻמְרֵי מְרֻדְכָי אֶסְתֵּר עָשָׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר הִיטָּהּ בְּאִמְנָה אֶתָּה.
Esther still told nothing of her kindred or her people as Mordechai had instructed her; for Esther continued to obey Mordechai, just as when she was reared by him (2:20).

§12 אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מְגִדַּת מוֹלְדָתָהּ — *ESTHER STILL TOLD NOTHING OF HER KINDRED OR HER PEOPLE.*

The Midrash notes that Esther’s behavior here followed a family pattern:

NOTES

108. *Yefeh Anaf*. Although the phrase, וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ, *Esther was taken to the king’s palace*, is also found in v. 8 above, there the implication is that she was brought against her will, and this did not need to be repeated here. Thus, it would have been more appropriate for the verse to have said, [or, וְתוּבָא אֶסְתֵּר, “Esther was brought”] (*Eitz Yosef*).

109. Interpreting וּתְלַקַּח in the sense of אַקְוִיחוֹן, an *acquisition* or a *purchase*; see *Yefeh Anaf*. [See also *Yefeh Anaf* for alternative versions of the text here, and see following note.]

110. That is, they sought to outbid each other for the great honor of escorting Esther into the king (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Toar to Bereishis Rabbah* 40 §5 and *Ohr Chadash*). According to *Bereishis Rabbah* 16 §5, the verb קָח can have the meaning of “elevate.” Thus, the phrase וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר can in fact be taken as an allusion to this idea that the courtiers were bidding up the “price” for accompanying Esther, elevating the value they attributed to her (*Yefeh Anaf, Eitz Yosef*; see also the parallel passage regarding Sarah in *Bereishis Rabbah* 40 §5; see *Matnos Kehunah* (here and to *Bereishis Rabbah* loc. cit.) for a different explanation of this passage.

111. Although Scripture above (vv. 2-3) had mentioned only the gathering of בְּתוּלוֹת, *young maidens*, i.e., girls who were still unmarried, from whom the king would select a successor to Vashti, R’ Chelbo is maintaining that in fact even married women were brought.

[*Maharal* in *Ohr Chadash* (quoted by *Eitz Yosef*) suggests that the passage above refers only to unmarried maidens because it was specifically the unmarried maidens who were first gathered under the

charge of Hegai (see v. 3); the married women were brought directly to Ahasuerus.]

112. Since the verse is in effect contrasting בְּתוּלוֹת, *maidens*, which clearly refers to young girls thus far unmarried, with נְשִׂימִים, *women*, it is evident that נְשִׂימִים here means married women (*Yefeh Anaf*; see *Ohr Chadash* for an alternative understanding of this exposition).

113. Above the king’s bed in the royal chambers (*Matnos Kehunah*). [It was customary at the time for an image of the queen to be placed in the king’s chambers (*Eitz Yosef*).]

114. Esther was a descendant of King Saul; see above, 4 §9 and *Megillah* 13b et al. [This description of Esther is an editorial comment by the Midrash, for Ahasuerus himself was unaware at the time of Esther’s lineage (see below, v. 20). Alternatively, the Midrash means that due to her exceedingly refined character Ahasuerus was able to sense her distinguished ancestry (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Menos HaLevi*; see also *Yefeh Anaf*).]

115. I.e., let the portrait of Vashti be replaced with that of Esther. See Insight A.

116. The description of Esther becoming queen תַּחַת וְשָׂתִי, *in place of Vashti*, is difficult, for Esther was not assuming Vashti’s position so much as filling a vacuum; Vashti had been removed in the third year of Ahasuerus’ reign (see above, v. 3), while Esther was not crowned queen till his seventh year (see v. 16). Hence, the Midrash interprets the verse as meaning that on becoming queen, Esther’s portrait was put in the place heretofore occupied by that of Vashti (*Yefeh Anaf*; see *Eitz Yosef* for an alternative understanding of this passage). [The Midrash’s interpretation of this phrase in terms of the images of Vashti and Esther is also found in the primary Aramaic *Targum* for this verse.]

INSIGHTS

A The Portrait of Vashti *Maharal* in *Ohr Chadash* argues that it seems incongruous for Ahasuerus to have kept the portrait of Vashti in place after having executed her. He therefore suggests that the אִיקוֹנִין of Vashti mentioned here does not refer to a physical picture or form but rather to a mental image. The Midrash is saying that even though

she was dead, the image of Vashti’s beauty still occupied a preeminent position in Ahasuerus’ thoughts. It was only once he had married Esther that the ghost of Vashti’s beauty was finally laid to rest, as Ahasuerus’ heart was taken by Esther’s true and noble beauty and charm (*Ohr Chadash* on 2:17).

מלמד שהתפשה שתיקה בעצמה כרחל וקנתה שתפשה פלף שתיקה — This verse teaches that [Esther] herself held to the attribute of silence, like Rachel, her ancestress,^[117] who had held the spindle of silence.^[118] עמדו כל גדולי זרעה בשתיקה — Similarly, all of [Rachel's] prominent offspring maintained a comparable silence.

The Midrash proceeds to elaborate concerning the silence of Rachel and that of her descendants:

רחל תפשה פלף שתיקה — Rachel held the spindle of silence; ראתה סבלונותיה ביד אחותה ושוקת gifts^[119] in the hands of her sister Leah, and yet remained silent.^[120] בנימין בנה תפס בשתיקה — Benjamin her son held onto the attribute of silence.

תדע שאבנו שהיתה בחשן היתה ישפה — Know that this is so, for [Benjamin's] stone in the Kohen Gadol's breastplate was the *yashfeh*,^[121] לומר יודע היה במכירת

לומר יודע היה במכירת — the name of the stone indicating that [Benjamin] was aware of the sale of Joseph by his brothers but nevertheless kept silent about it; *yashfeh* (ישפה) means ישפה, "there is a mouth," but it was silent.^[122] שאול

בן בנה יואת דבר המלוכה לא הגיד לו — Likewise, Saul, [Rachel's] more distant descendant, also employed the trait of silence, as Scripture states, *Saul answered his uncle, "He told us that the donkeys had been found," but he did not tell him about the matter of the kingship of which Samuel had spoken* (I Samuel 10:16).^[123]

איין אסתר מאגדת מולדתה ואת עמה — Similarly, Esther employed the trait of silence, as our verse states, *Esther still told nothing of her kindred*.^[124]

בימים ההם ומרדכי יושב בשער המלך קצף בגתו ותירש שני סריסי המלך משמרי הסף ויבקשו לשלח יד במלך אחשורוש. In those days, while Mordechai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigsan and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains of the guardians of the threshold, became enraged and sought to send [their] hand against King Ahasuerus (2:21).

§13 בימים ההם ומרדכי יושב בשער המלך קצף בגתו ותירש שני סריסי המלך וגו' — IN THOSE DAYS, WHILE MORDECHAI WAS SITING AT THE KING'S GATE, BIGSAN AND TERESH, TWO OF THE KING'S CHAMBERLAINS OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE THRESHOLD, BECAME ENRAGED, ETC.

The verse gives no clear cause for the chamberlains' rage against the king. The Midrash offers its first approach:

מה קצפון היה שם — What was the nature of the rage that existed there?^[125] מעביר שנים ומשיב אחר — Bigsan and Teresh had the following complaint against Ahasuerus: He has removed two and placed one;

מעביר שני קלסריקון שהן שומרי הסף ומושיב הברברי — he has removed two noblemen^[126] who are distinguished "guardians of the threshold" from their post at the entrance to the palace, and instead has placed this barbarian^[127] sitting at the king's gate.^[128]

Another approach finds the secret of this rage in a verse in *Psalms*:

רבי ברביה בשם רבי לוי אמר — R' Berechyah said in the name of R' Levi:

NOTES

117. Esther, like her paternal cousin Mordechai, was from the tribe of Benjamin (see above, v. 5) and thus a descendant of Rachel, Benjamin's mother (*Genesis* 35:18).

118. That is, both Esther and Rachel kept silent concerning a significant issue; see discussion below in regard to Rachel's silence. The Midrash metaphorically describes Rachel's silence as a spindle that she is holding as if to say that just as it is the norm for women to hold spindles, so too it was the norm for Rachel to maintain her silence, constantly and continuously (*Eitz Yosef*). Alternatively, the word פלף, lit., spindle, is to be rendered here "craft." [The Midrash accordingly means that Rachel practiced the craft of silence] (*Matnos Kehunah*).

Eitz Yosef, following *Yefeh Anaf*, explains that in accordance with Mordechai's instructions, Esther had been silent when first brought to the harem (above, v. 10), out of fear that were she to reveal that she was descended from King Saul (see above), Ahasuerus would be impressed by such noble lineage and would definitely keep her as his wife (see *Rashi* on v. 10). As such, that silence had been utilitarian and did not represent an essential facet of her character. However, now that she had been made queen anyway, that reason was no longer relevant. Her present silence was due to her reluctance to boast in any sense about her illustrious ancestry, and was therefore evidence of her inherent reticence and modesty. [Although our verse describes her silence now as באשר צוה עליה מרדכי, as *Mordechai had instructed her*, that means only that she continued the same silence that he had previously instructed her to keep, but not that she was still being silent because he had so instructed her.]

119. The gifts Jacob had sent her in expectation of their forthcoming marriage; see *Genesis* 30:18-20 (*Matnos Kehunah*; see *Tanchuma, Vayeitzei* 6).

120. As part of his ruse, on the night of the wedding Laban dressed Leah in the clothing that Jacob had sent for Rachel, in order to fool Jacob into thinking that she was actually Rachel; see *Genesis* 30:23. Alternatively: Laban had always intended to substitute Leah for Rachel as Jacob's bride. Therefore, throughout the betrothal period, all the gifts that Jacob sent for Rachel, Laban immediately gave to Leah instead (*Eitz Yosef*). In either event, Rachel saw that the gifts had been given to her sister and understood her father's intentions. Nevertheless, she kept silent and did not warn Jacob, so that Leah would not be shamed. See also *Megillah* 13b.

121. Each of the twelve tribes had its name inscribed on one of the twelve stones of the Breastplate (*Exodus* 28:21). Benjamin, the youngest of the sons of Jacob, had his name inscribed on the last of the stones, the *yashfeh* (*Shemos Rabbah* 38 §9).

122. That is, ישפה is a contraction of the words ישפה, "there is a mouth," denoting that although Benjamin was silent to his father concerning what his brothers had done with Joseph, it was not because he was unable to speak (i.e., because he himself was ignorant); rather, he was able to speak, for he knew what had happened, yet nevertheless he was silent. *Matnos Kehunah* (on *Bereishis Rabbah* 71 §5) explains that he reasoned that since God had not revealed the matter to Jacob, he too should not say anything; see also *Bereishis Rabbah* 84 §21.

There does not appear to be any other Scriptural source for the idea that Benjamin was aware of his brothers' sale of Joseph. Rather, the Midrash means that the word ישפה itself indicates that Benjamin was aware but was nonetheless silent (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*). [The Midrash does not explain how Benjamin became aware of his brothers' deed, for presumably he was not with them when they sold Joseph. *Eitz Yosef* suggests that Isaac, who knew about the sale (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 84 §21), had told Benjamin although he had not told Jacob. See also *Eitz Yosef* to *Bereishis Rabbah* 71 §5.]

123. Saul did not tell his uncle that Samuel had said that he, Saul, would be the future king of Israel, his reticence being due to his profound modesty; see *Eitz Yosef*.

124. See the similar discussion concerning Rachel and her descendants in *Megillah* 13a-b.

125. I.e., what was it that Ahasuerus had done that had enraged his two chamberlains (*Eitz Yosef*; however, see *Yefeh Anaf*).

126. Referring to themselves.

127. Meaning Mordechai, for in the eyes of the Persian nobility the Jews were a lowly and barbaric nation (*Radal*; see also *Matnos Kehunah*).

128. I.e., their former position. The reference to Mordechai sitting at the king's gate appears extraneous in our verse; therefore, the Midrash understands that it is indicating the reason for the chamberlains' rage: the post that Mordechai was now occupying (*Maharzu*; see also *Eitz Yosef*).

According to the parallel text in *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Esther* §1053), it was Esther who had orchestrated Mordechai's appointment, convincing Ahasuerus that it would be worthwhile to have a righteous Jew stationed at the gate where he would be available to give sagacious advice when needed, as Nebuchadnezzar in his day had similarly stationed Daniel (*Daniel* 2:49). Bigsan and Teresh planned to kill Ahasuerus so that everyone would comment that when they had guarded the palace, the king had been safe, but when Mordechai began sitting at the king's gate in their place, the king was assassinated.

“ויבקש הדבר וימצא וגו' ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני §14 המלך” — *THE MATTER WAS INVESTIGATED AND FOUND [TO BE TRUE]... IT WAS RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES IN THE KING'S PRESENCE.*

ויבקש הדבר וימצא וגו' — *It is written, Go and see the works of HASHEM, Who has placed devastation in the land (Psalms 46:9). The king incited rage in servants against their masters in order to grant greatness to the righteous.*^[129] *Thus it is written, Bigsan and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains... became enraged and sought to send [their] hand against King Ahasuerus. God incited that rage as a means with which to grant greatness to Mordechai.*^[130] *Similarly, [God] at times incites rage in masters against their servants, as when He sought to grant greatness to Joseph.*^[131] *Thus it is written, Pharaoh had become enraged at his servants (Genesis 41:10).*^[132]

ויבקש הדבר וימצא ויפתלו שניהם על עץ ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני המלך.

The matter was investigated and found [to be true], and they were both hanged on a gallows. It was recorded in the book of chronicles in the king's presence (2:23).

ויבקש הדבר וימצא וגו' ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני §14 המלך — *THE MATTER WAS INVESTIGATED AND FOUND [TO BE TRUE]... IT WAS RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES IN THE KING'S PRESENCE.*

Mordechai's thwarting of the attempted assassination of Ahasuerus appears to be a minor episode, duly recorded and forgotten. But in the end it played a pivotal role in the foiling of Haman's plot and the salvation of the Jews.^[134] The Midrash notes an important lesson to be learned from this:

רבי לוי בשם רבי אחא בר שילא איש כפר תמרתא אמר: ומה אם ספרו של ר' — *R' Levi said in the name of R' Acha bar Shila from Kfar Temarta: Now, if even with regard to the book of Ahasuerus, who is of flesh and blood, it is so,*^[135] *then, when the book of the Holy One, blessed is He, is brought before Him, that book of which it is written, "ויקשב ה' וישמע ויכתב בספר זכרון לפניו וגו'" — Then those who fear HASHEM spoke to one another, and HASHEM listened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear HASHEM and those who give thought to His Name (Malachi 3:16),*^[136] *על אחת כמה וכמה — how much more so!*^[137]

NOTES

129. That is, the rage of the servants is the work of God, Who has placed this destructive force in the land for the purpose of granting greatness to the righteous; see *Maharzu*. [It should be noted that a parallel passage in *Yalkut Shimoni, Vayeishev* §146 cites a different verse, *Go and see the works of God, He is awesome in "alilah" with mankind (Psalms 66:5)*, interpreting *עלילה* in the sense of pretext. When God wishes to effect His *works* in the world, He gives human beings a pretext to act in a manner that will bring about His desired ends (see also *Tanchuma, Vayeishev* 4). *Eitz Yosef* emends the text in our passage so that it too cites this verse rather than *Psalms 46:9*.]

130. That is, according to this approach it was not a dismissal from their posts or any other significant grievance that provoked the rage of Bigsan and Teresh against Ahasuerus. Rather, so as to start the chain of events that ultimately led to Mordechai's rise to greatness, God caused their anger to be aroused over some relatively insignificant matter that would not normally have produced such a response (*Eitz Yosef*).

131. Depending on the circumstances, God may employ opposite strategies to achieve similar ends, at times inciting the servant's rage and at times inciting the master's rage (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Maharsha to Megillah* 13b).

132. Thereby setting off the chain of events that ultimately resulted in Joseph being released from prison and appointed Pharaoh's viceroy. As with Bigsan and Teresh, Scripture does not specify the reason for Pharaoh's rage at his two servants since there too, whatever infraction on their part had set off the rage was not its true cause (*Eitz Yosef*).

[The verse quoted here is from the cupbearer's retelling of the story of his imprisonment and his encounter in prison with Joseph. The Midrash

cites this verse rather than the earlier verse from Scripture's account of the actual event (*Genesis 40:2*) because this verse leads directly into the story of Joseph's release and immediate rise to greatness (*Eitz Yosef*, from *Yefeh Anaf*.)

133. Standard texts of the Midrash include only the opening phrase of the verse, *ויבקש הדבר וימצא*. Here we have followed *Radal's* emendation of the text, since the focus of the passage is on the verse's conclusion.

134. See below, Chs. 6-7.

135. Viz., that when it was ultimately brought to be read before the king, it led to [Mordechai's being rewarded by Ahasuerus (Ch. 6) and subsequently to] the salvation of the Jewish people (Ch. 7) (*Eitz Yosef*).

136. I.e., the book in which God records all the meritorious acts of the righteous.

137. [It is not conceivable that a human being would in any sense be more just than God; it thus follows that] all the righteous whose deeds are written in God's book shall surely be amply rewarded (*Eitz Yosef*; see also *Radal*).

[As interpreted by the Midrash, the story of Mordechai exposing the chamberlains' plot thus bears an encouraging message to all who may be despairing due to the long and troubled exile that the Jewish people have been experiencing (and the other apparent injustices of the world): like Mordechai and the Jews of his day, the righteous shall eventually receive their deserved reward. *Eitz Yosef* argues further that it is specifically to allude to this message that Scripture mentions here that these events were recorded in the royal chronicles, for otherwise, the reference later to Mordechai's deed being found written in the chronicles (below, 6:2) would have proven sufficient.]