



## The Chanukah Story That Wasn't: The Book of Judith

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1. An 11<sup>th</sup> century *Yotzer* poem of Chanukah, **אודך כי אנפת בי ותשב**, translated by Dr. Sara Reguer  
<http://opensiddur.org/prayers/lunar-cycle/commemorative-days/hanukkah/odekha-ki-anaftha-hymn-first-shabbat-of-hanukah-yosef-bar-shlomo-of-carcassone-circa-11th-c>

סְכַכְתָּנִי בַלַּיְלָה הִיא יְהוּדִית	But during that night, Judith came to my defense.
סוּדָה בְּרוּךְ וְטַעֲמָה עֲדִית	Her secret project was blessed and her reasoning excellent.
סוּחֲרָה לְעֵמָה וּלְגִנוּ לְפִידִית.	She encouraged her people and was a torch of fire against Greece.
עִיר וַיִּשְׁבֶּיהָ בְּקֶשֶׁר בְּחַזוֹתָהּ	Content that the city and its citizens were on the right path,
עֲלֵצָה וְתוֹלָדָה עִמָּה שִׁפְחָתָהּ	She was very happy and went with her slave,
עַל ד' הִשְׁלִיכָה יְהִבָּתָהּ.	And putting all of her hope in G-d
עֲמָדָה בְּרֹאשׁ מְחַנּוֹת הָאוֹיֵב	She stopped at the entrance of the enemy encampment
עֲלִיצוֹתֵינוּ לְהַפֵּג וְתַגְלִינוּ לְדַיֵּב	In order to undo their happiness and make them suffer
עַל רֹאשׁוֹ גָּמוּלוֹ לְתַיֵּב.	And feel the punishment for the sins of their leader.

### Question 1: The Story of Judith: Is it a Chanukah story?

2. English Text of Judith: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=3825845>
3. Prof. Deborah Levine Gera, *The Jewish Textual Traditions* (<https://books.openedition.org/obp/986?lang=en>)  
The book opens with the successful campaign waged by Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, against Arphaxad, king of the Medes. Nebuchadnezzar then sends his chief of staff, Holofernes, on an ambitious and punitive military campaign directed against those who did not join him in his earlier, successful war. All nations give way before Holofernes until he approaches the Jews, who decide to resist. The Jews of Bethulia must block the Assyrians' path to Jerusalem and its temple. Holofernes, who is unacquainted with the Jews, learns something of their history and religious beliefs from his ally, the Ammonite Achior. Despite Achior's warning that G-d may well defend His people, Holofernes places a siege on Bethulia. When water supplies run low, the people of the town press their leaders to surrender to the Assyrians and Uzziah, the chief leader, promises to capitulate if there is no relief within five days. It is at this point that the pious, beautiful widow, Judith, steps on stage. Judith, who leads an ascetic and solitary life, summons Uzziah and his fellow leaders to her home and reprimands them for their lack of faith in G-d. She then takes matters into her own hands. Judith prays, bathes, and removes her widow's weeds. "Dressed to kill," Judith leaves Bethulia for the enemy Assyrian camp, accompanied only by her faithful maid. The glamorous Judith charms and deceives Holofernes – as well as his trusty eunuch Bagoas – and promises to deliver the Jews to the Assyrians with G-d's help. In her dealings with Holofernes, Judith is not only beautiful, but sharp-witted. Her exchanges with the enemy commander are ironic and two-edged and her subtle, duplicitous words are one of the chief charms of the apocryphal book. Holofernes invites Judith to a party in order to seduce her, but he drinks a great deal of wine and collapses on his couch. Judith then seizes Holofernes's sword and cuts off the head of the sleeping general. She returns to Bethulia with Holofernes's head in a bag (and his canopy as well). Achior the Ammonite converts to Judaism when he learns of Judith's deed and sees the actual dead man's head. The Jews of Bethulia, following Judith's advice, subsequently take the offensive, attacking the Assyrian army and defeating them. Judith, praised by all, sings a victory song and then goes back to her quiet life at home. She lives until the ripe old age of 105 and is mourned by all of Israel when she dies.

### 4. Book of Judith, Chapter 12, Revised Standard Version

Then he commanded them to bring her in where his silver dishes were kept, and ordered them to set a table for her with some of his own food and to serve her with his own wine. But Judith said, "I cannot eat it, lest it be an offense; but I will be provided from the things I have brought with me." Holofernes said to her, "If your supply runs out, where can we get more like it for you? For none of your people is here with us." Judith replied, "As your soul lives, my lord, your servant will not use up the things I have with me before the Lord carries out by my hand what he has determined to do."

5. Book of Judith, Chapter 12, Revised Standard Version

And Holofernes was greatly pleased with her, and drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born.

6. Book of Judith, Chapter 16, Revised Standard Version

And Judith said, Begin a song to my G-d with tambourines, sing to my Lord with cymbals. Raise to him a new psalm; exalt him, and call upon his name. For G-d is the Lord who crushes wars; for he has delivered me out of the hands of my pursuers, and brought me to his camp, in the midst of the people. The Assyrian came down from the mountains of the north; he came with myriads of his warriors; their multitude blocked up the valleys, their cavalry covered the hills. He boasted that he would burn up my territory, and kill my young men with the sword, and dash my infants to the ground and seize my children as prey, and take my virgins as booty. But the Lord Almighty has foiled them by the hand of a woman.

7. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century Lithuania), Aruch haShulchan Orach Chaim 670:8

ועוד בהמשך הזמן נעשה נס ע"י יהודית שהשקתה את האויב חלב ועל סמך זה יש מדקדקין לאכול גבינה בחנוכה אף שלא היה זה בזמן נס חנוכה  
Also, later on a miracle happened via Judith, who fed the enemy milk. Based on this, there are those who are careful to eat cheese on Chanukah, even though this did not happen at the time of the miracle of Chanukah.

Question 2: What does Judith have to do with the Menorah?

8. Talmud, Shabbat 23a

אשה ודאי מדליקה, דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: נשים חייבות בנר חנוכה, שאף הן היו באותו הנס.

A woman definitely lights, for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Women are obligated in the lamp of Chanukah, for they were also in that miracle.

9. Rashi (11<sup>th</sup> century France), Comment to Megillah 4a

שאף על הנשים גזר המן "להשמיד להרוג ולאבד... מנער ועד זקן טף ונשים וגו'."

Even upon the women, Haman decreed "to destroy, kill and eliminate... from young to old, children and women..."

10. Rashi (11<sup>th</sup> century France), Comment to Shabbat 23a

שגזרו יוונים על כל בתולות הנשואות להיבעל לטפסר תחלה, ועל יד אשה נעשה הנס.

Because the Greeks decreed that all women who were to be married for the first time would be taken by the general first, and because the miracle happened via a woman.

11. Tosafot (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe), Comment to Pesachim 108b

היו באותו הנס - פי' רשב"ם שעל ידם נגאלו וכן במגילה ע"י אסתר ובהנוכה ע"י יהודית

"Were also in that miracle" - Rashbam explained that via them, they were redeemed. So, too, re: Megillah via Esther, and Chanukah via Judith.

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12. Rambam (12<sup>th</sup> century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Megillah and Chanukah 3:3

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל, ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס, וימים אלו הן הנקראין חנוכה והן אסורין בהספד ותענית כימי הפורים, והדלקת הנרות בהן מצוה מדברי סופרים כקריאת המגילה.

Because of this, the sages of that generation enacted that these eight days, from the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, should be days of joy and Hallel, and they light lamps in the evening at the entrances of houses on each night of the eight nights, to demonstrate and reveal the miracle. And these days are called "Chanukah", and one may neither eulogize nor fast on them, like the days of Purim. And lighting lamps on them is a rabbinic mitzvah, like reading the Megillah.

13. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (20<sup>th</sup> c. USA), cited by Rabbi Shlomo Pick, Moadei haRav (Eng.) pg. 126

The Rav explained that there is a difference between "to demonstrate" (*le-har'ot*) and "to reveal" (*le-gallo*). "To demonstrate" means "to show," but "to reveal" means to proclaim that which is unknown... Thus, there are two aspects

to the *pirsumei nissa* of the Chanukah candle: to show and demonstrate, and also to reveal. (1) To show and demonstrate, in order to cause others to focus their attention upon the miracle. This is achieved by lighting candles in a place that is open to the public eye. (2) To reveal – one must explain to the people the meaning of Chanukah, what the holiday represents, and why we fought the Hellenists. It is our duty to analyze the meaning of the miracle, that is, to reveal it..

Publicizing the miracle of Chanukah attests that our connection and relationship to the Chanukah candle is similar to our connection and relationship to the *Shekhinah*. The Divine Presence turns to the Jewish people by way of the Chanukah candle, and the Chanukah candle attests that the *Shekhinah* rests among us.

#### 14. Book of Judith, Chapter 13, Revised Standard Version

Now Judith had told her maid to stand outside the bedchamber and to wait for her to come out, as she did on the other days; for she said she would be going out for her prayers. She had said the same thing to Bagoas. So everyone went out, and no one, either small or great, was left in the bedchamber. Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, "O Lord Gd of all might, look in this hour on the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. Now indeed is the time to help Your heritage and to carry out my design to destroy the enemies who have risen up against us." She went up to the bedpost near Holofernes' head, and took down his sword that hung there. She came close to his bed, took hold of the hair of his head, and said, "Give me strength today, O Lord Gd of Israel!" Then she struck his neck twice with all her might, and cut off his head. Next she rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts. Soon afterward she went out and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag.

Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to do for prayer. They passed through the camp, circled around the valley, and went up the mountain to Bethulia, and came to its gates. From a distance Judith called out to the sentries at the gates, "Open, open the gate! Gd, our Gd, is with us, still showing His power in Israel and his strength against our enemies, as He has done today!"

When the people of her town heard her voice, they hurried down to the town gate and summoned the elders of the town. They all ran together, both small and great, for it seemed unbelievable that she had returned. They opened the gate and welcomed them. Then they lit a fire to give light, and gathered around them. Then she said to them with a loud voice, "Praise Gd, O praise Him! Praise Gd, who has not withdrawn His mercy from the house of Israel, but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!"

Then she pulled the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, "See here, the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction, and that he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me."

All the people were greatly astonished. They bowed down and worshiped Gd, and said with one accord, "Blessed are You our Gd, who have this day humiliated the enemies of Your people."