



## The Role of the Jew in Exile: Reading the subtext of Megillas Esther

shiur this evening is kindly sponsored by **Drs Leah and Allen Wiesenfeld** upon the yahrtzeit of Leah's father, **Rabbi Marvin Balsam**, Pinchas Matisyahu ben Yoseph Mordechai ע"ה

### Poppy Seeds on Purim

1. Ramo, OC 695:2

יש אומרים שיש לאכול מאכל זרעונים בפורים זכר לזרעונים שאכל דניאל וחביריו בבבל (כל בו)



### Background

2. Daniel, Perek 1

<p><b>א</b> בשנת שלוש, למלכות יהויקים מלך-יהודה--בא נבוכדנאצר מלך-בבל ירושלים, ויצר עליה.</p>	<p><b>1</b> In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.</p>
<p><b>ב</b> ויתן אדני בידו את-יהויקים מלך-יהודה, ומקצת כלי בית-האלהים, ויביאם ארץ-שנער, בית אלהיו; ואת-הכלים הביא, בית אוצר אלהיו.</p>	<p><b>2</b> And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god, and the vessels he brought into the treasure-house of his god.</p>
<p><b>ג</b> ויאמר המלך, לאשפנז רב סריסיו: להביא מבני ישראל, ומזרע המלוכה--ומן הפרתמים.</p>	<p><b>3</b> And the king spoke unto Ashpenaz his chief officer, that he should bring in certain of the children of Israel, and of the seed royal, and of the nobles,</p>

<p>ד ילדים אשר אין-בהם כל-מאום וטובי מראה ומשפלים בכל-חכמה, וידעי דעת ומביני מדע, ואשר כח בהם, לעמוד בהיכל המלך; וללמדם ספר, ולשון כשדים.</p>	<p>4 youths in whom was no blemish, but fair to look on, and skilful in all wisdom, and skilful in knowledge, and discerning in thought, and such as had ability to stand in the king's palace; and that he should teach them the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.</p>
<p>ה וימן להם המלך דבר-יום ביומו, מפת-בג המלך ומיין משתיו, ולגדלם, שנים שלוש; ומקצתם--ועמדו, לפני המלך.</p>	<p>5 And the king appointed for them a daily portion of the king's food, and of the wine which he drank, and that they should be nourished three years; that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.</p>
<p>ו ויהי בהם, מבני יהודה--דניאל חנניה, מישאל ועזריה.</p>	<p>6 Now among these were, of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.</p>
<p>ז וישם להם שר הסריסים, שמות; וישם לדניאל בלטשצאר, ולחנניה שדרך, ולמישאל מישך, ולעזריה עבד נגו.</p>	<p>7 And the chief of the officers gave names unto them: unto Daniel he gave the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.</p>
<p>ח וישם דניאל על-לבו, אשר לא-יתגאל בפת-בג המלך ובין משתיו; ויבקש משר הסריסים, אשר לא יתגאל.</p>	<p>8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's food, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the officers that he might not defile himself.</p>
<p>ט ויתן האלהים את-דניאל, לחסד ולרחמים, לפני שר הסריסים.</p>	<p>9 And God granted Daniel mercy and compassion in the sight of the chief of the officers.</p>
<p>י ויאמר שר הסריסים, לדניאל--ירא אני את-אדני המלך, אשר מנה את-מאכלכם ואת-משתיכם: אשר למה יראה את-פניכם זעפים, מן-הילדים אשר כגילכם, וחיבתם את-ראשי, למלך.</p>	<p>10 And the chief of the officers said unto Daniel: 'I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces sad in comparison with the youths that are of your own age? so would ye endanger my head with the king.'</p>
<p>יא ויאמר דניאל, אל-המלצר--אשר מנה, שר הסריסים, על-דניאל חנניה, מישאל ועזריה.</p>	<p>11 Then said Daniel to the steward, whom the chief of the officers had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:</p>
<p>יב נס-נא את-עבדי, ימים עשרה; ויתנו-לנו מן-הזרעים, ונאכלה--ומים ונשתה.</p>	<p>12 'Try thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.</p>
<p>יג ויראו לפניך, מראינו, ומראה הילדים, האכלים את פת-בג המלך; וכאשר תראה, עשה עם-עבדיך.</p>	<p>13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the youths that eat of the king's food; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.'</p>
<p>יד וישמע להם, לדבר הזה; וינסם, ימים עשרה.</p>	<p>14 So he hearkened unto them in this matter, and tried them ten days.</p>
<p>טו ומקצת, ימים עשרה, נראה מראהם טוב, ובריאי בשר: מן-כל-הילדים--האכלים, את פת-בג המלך.</p>	<p>15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer, and they were fatter in flesh, than all the youths that did eat of the king's food.</p>
<p>טז ויהי המלצר, נשא את-פת-בגם, ויין, משתיהם; ונתן להם, זרענים.</p>	<p>16 So the steward took away their food, and the wine that they should drink, and gave them pulse.</p>
<p>יז והילדים האלה ארבעתם, נתן להם האלהים מדע והשכל בכל-ספר וחכמה; ודניאל הבין, בכל-חזון וחקמות.</p>	<p>17 Now as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.</p>

<p>יח וְלִמְקַצְתָּ, הַיָּמִים, אֲשֶׁר-אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ, לְהַבִּיאֵם; וַיָּבִיאוּם שַׂר הַסָּרִיסִים, לִפְנֵי נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר.</p>	<p>18 And at the end of the days which the king had appointed for bringing them in, the chief of the officers brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.</p>
<p>יט וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם, הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְלֹא נִמְצָא מִכֻּלָּם, כְּדַנְיָאֵל הַנְּנִיָּה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְעִזְרְיָה; וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ, לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ.</p>	<p>19 And the king spoke with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore stood they before the king.</p>
<p>כ וְכֹל, דְּבַר חֵכְמַת בִּינָה, אֲשֶׁר-בִּקֵּשׁ מֵהֶם, הַמֶּלֶךְ-- וַיִּמְצָאם עֶשְׂרֵי יָדוֹת, עַל כָּל-הַחֲרָטְמִים הָאֲשִׁפִּים, אֲשֶׁר, בְּכָל-מַלְכוּתוֹ.</p>	<p>20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his realm.</p>
<p>כא וַיְהִי, דְנִיָּאֵל, עַד-שְׁנַת אַחַת, לְכוֹרֶשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ. {פ}</p>	<p>21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus. {P}</p>



What does this have to do with Esther?

3. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 13a

וְזֹאת שִׁבְעַת הַנְּעוּרוֹת וְגו' אָמַר רַבָּא שְׁהִיתָה מוֹנָה בְּהֶן יָמֵי שַׁבַּת וַיִּשְׁנֶה וְזֹאת נִעְרוֹתֶיהָ וְגו' אָמַר רַב שְׁהֵאֲכִילָהּ מֵאֲכָל יְהוּדִי

The verse states: “**And the seven maids** chosen to be given her out of the king’s house” (Esther 2:9). **Rava said:** She would have a separate maid attend her each day, and she would **count the days of the week by them**, so she was always aware when Shabbat was. The verse continues: “**And he advanced her and her maids** to the best place in the house of the women.” **Rav said:** The advancement in the verse signals **that he fed her food of Jews**, i.e., kosher food.

וּשְׁמוּאֵל אָמַר שְׁהֵאֲכִילָהּ קַדְלֵי דְחִזְרִי

**And Shmuel said** an alternative understanding: The advancement was a well-intentioned act in **that he fed her pig hinds**, thinking she would view it as a delicacy, although in fact they were not kosher.

וְרַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר זְרַעוֹנִים וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר וַיְהִי הַמֶּלֶצֶר נוֹשֵׂא אֶת פַּת בָּגֶם וְנוֹתֵן לָהֶם זְרַעוֹנִים

**And Rabbi Yoḥanan said** a third understanding: He gave her **vegetables**, which did not pose a problem with regard to the kosher laws. **And so it states** with regard to the kindness done for Daniel and his associates: **“So the steward took away their food and the wine that they should drink; and gave them vegetables”** (Daniel 1:16).

4. Kaf Hachaim sk 25

**(כה) שם בהגה. י"א שיש לאכול מאכל זרעונים וכו' כ"כ ב"י בשם או"ח** נהגו לאכול בליל פורים אחר התענית זרעונים זכר לזרעונים וכו' והטעם כתב הלבוש שגם המגילה היה ג"כ ע"י דניאל שהוא התך לפי דברי רז"ל. והלב"ש כתב דגם אסתר אכלה זרעונים כדאמרין פ"ק דמגילה וישנה לטוב שהאכילה זרעונים עכ"ל ור"ל שגם עי"ז יבא לזכור הנס:

Esther and her Culture

5. Esther 2:8-11

<p><b>ח</b> וַיְהִי, בְּהַשְׁמַע דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדַתּוֹ, וּבְהַקְבִּיץ נְעוּרוֹת רַבּוֹת אֶל-שׁוֹשַׁן הַבְּיָרָה, אֶל-יַד הַגִּי; וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל-בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ, אֶל-יַד הַגִּי שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים.</p>	<p><b>8</b> So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was published, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the castle, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken into the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.</p>
<p><b>ט</b> וַתִּיטֵב הַנְּעִרָה בְּעֵינָיו, וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו, וַיְבַהֵל אֶת-תַּמְרוּקִיָּה וְאֶת-מְנוּחָה לְתֵת לָהּ, וְאֶת שִׁבְעַת הַנְּעוּרוֹת הָרְאיוֹת לְתֵת-לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ; וַיִּשְׁנֶה וְאֶת-נְעוּרוֹתֶיהָ לְטוֹב, בְּבֵית הַנָּשִׁים.</p>	<p><b>9</b> And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her ointments, with her portions, and the seven maidens, who were meet to be given her out of the king's house; and he advanced her and her maidens to the best place in the house of the women.</p>
<p><b>י</b> לֹא-הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר, אֶת-עַמָּהּ וְאֶת-מוֹלְדוֹתָהּ:  כִּי מְרַדְּכִי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ, אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִגִּיד.</p>	<p><b>10</b> Esther had not made known her people nor her kindred; for Mordecai had charged her that she should not tell it.</p>
<p><b>יא</b> וּבְכָל-יּוֹם יּוֹם--מְרַדְּכִי מִתְהַלֵּךְ, לְפָנָיו חָצֵר בֵּית-הַנָּשִׁים:  לְדַעַת אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר, וּמַה-יַּעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ.</p>	<p><b>11</b> And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what would become of her.</p>

Earlier Models

Avraham

6. Bereishis 12:13

<p><b>יג</b> אֲמַרְי-נָא, אַחֲתִי אַתְּ--לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב-לִי בְּעַבְדֶּיךָ, וַיְחִיתָה נַפְשִׁי בְּגִלְדֶּךָ.</p>	<p><b>13</b> Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake, and that my soul may live because of thee.'</p>
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ז וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם, לְאִשְׁתּוֹ,  
וַיֹּאמֶר, אַחֹתִי הוּא: כִּי יִרְא,  
לֵאמֹר אִשְׁתִּי, פֶּן-יַהַרְגֵנִי אַנְשֵׁי  
הַמָּקוֹם עַל-רֵבֶקָה, כִּי-טוֹבֵת  
מְרֵאָה הוּא.

7 And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said: 'She is my sister'; for he feared to say: 'My wife'; 'lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah, because she is fair to look upon.'

ו וַיֹּאמֶר, יִשְׂרָאֵל, לָמָּה הִרְעַתֶּם,  
לִי--לְהַגִּיד לְאִישׁ, הָעוֹד לָכֶם  
אָח.

6 And Israel said: 'Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?'

ז וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׂאוּל שְׂאֵל-הָאִישׁ לָנוּ  
וּלְמוֹלְדֵתָנוּ לֵאמֹר, הָעוֹד אָבִיכֶם  
חַי הֵיִשׁ לָכֶם אָח, וְנַגֵּד-לוֹ, עַל-פִּי  
הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה; הִידוּעַ נִדְעַ--כִּי  
יֹאמֶר, הוֹרִידוּ אֶת-אָחִיכֶם.

7 And they said: 'The man asked straitly concerning ourselves, and concerning our kindred, saying: Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words; could we in any wise know that he would say: Bring your brother down?'

## Why didn't she tell?

### Trying to Control the Outcome

אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַגִּיד. כִּדֵּי שִׂיאֲמָרוּ שֶׁהִיא מְשַׁפְּחָה בְּזוּיָהּ וַיִּשְׁלַחֶהָ, שָׂאם נִדְעוּ שֶׁהִיא מְשַׁפְּחַת שְׂאוּל הַמֶּלֶךְ הָיוּ מִחְזִיקִים בָּהּ:

ויש לשאול אחר שראינו כי מרדכי היה מאנשי הגדולה והוא שלישי [צ"ל ששי כמו בסמוך וכן יש להגיה בנדפס] לעולי גולה עם זרובבל, למה צוה על אסתר שלא תגיד עמה, אולי אם תגיד שהיא מגלות יהודה לא יקחנה אחשוורוש. והנה יש בדברי יחיד כי פחד בעבור היותה ממשפחת שאול, ולפי דעתי שכל היהודים נבזים היו בעיני המלכות, הלא תראה דבר בלשצר לדניאל די מן בני גלותא דיהוד, והנכון בעיני כי ראה מרדכי שהמלך לא בקש לקחת בת מלך רק היופי לבדו ולא יחוש מאי זה עם תהיה וידע כי אסתר היתה יפה מאוד ופחד שלא ימצא כמוה ויקחנה לאשה. ואם היא תגיד שלא תאכל פת בג המלך יכריחנה, כי אם היתה גברת תוכל להסתיר עצמה, ואחרים אמרו שידע דרך הנבואה שתגיע לישראל ישועה על ידה:

## The Position of a Jew in Exile

11. Ha'emek Davar, Bereishis 43:6

ויאמר ישראל. כתיב כאן שם ישראל כי בא בכאן ללמד דעת לדורות הבאים אשר יהיו בגלות ויעמדו להיות נשפט לפני אדונים שלא לדבר יותר מהתשובה על השאל:

12. Ohr Chadash: Maharal

"לא הגידה אסתר וגו'" (פסוק י). פירוש זה, כי אם היתה מגדת עמה ומולדתה, היה מרדכי חושש, כי שיהיו יראים האומות שהמלכה תגדל מולדתה על כל השרים, ותשפיל אחרים. או באולי יהיו יראים כיון שהמלכה מן היהודים, תהיה המלכה שונאה את אשר אינה מן אומתה, ותהיה מסיתה את המלך עליהם. ובודאי הם חפצים יותר לעשות מלכה מן אומה שלהם, ובשביל כך יהיו חושבים להפיל את אסתר בכמה דברים של לשון הרע, עד שיהיה נעשה לה כמו שנעשה לושתי, ולכך צוה עליה כי לא תגיד את עמה ואת מולדתה.

## Humility:

13. Mesorat HaRav, R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik

**Esther, לא הגידה אסתר את עמה ואת מולדתה כי מרדכי צוה עליה אשר לא תגיד** *meanwhile, made no mention of her people or her birth, for Mordekhai had bid her strictly not to tell.* Had Mordekhai abandoned caution and adopted the attitude of the arrogant fool, had he let everybody know that he was related to the queen, he would have commanded their respect. However, had he been proud and vain, had he boasted that he is a relation of the queen, the whole miracle would not have happened. The miracle was made possible by Mordekhai's caution and humility. He was silent, humble; he was waiting for something to happen. He knew that the more fantastic the success story, the more vulnerable man is and the more intense is the need for prayer. Vulnerability of man is proportionate to his greatness. The greater the success, the more vulnerable he is. Mordekhai knew that as Esther climbed up to the very heights of success, the deeper became the abyss into which she might plunge. Because of Mordekhai's humility and because of his awareness of vulnerability and caution, the great miracle happened. In sum, vulnerability leads to humility, humility to caution, and caution leads to success. (*Days of Deliverance*)

## Why did Achashverosh choose her?

### 14. Esther 2:18-20

<p>יח ויעש המלך משתה גדול, לכל-שריו ועבדיו--את, משתה אסתר; והנחה למדינות עשה, ויתן משאת כנד המלך.</p>	<p><b>18</b> Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the bounty of the king.</p>
<p>יט ובהקבץ בתולות, שנית; ומרדכי, ישב בשער-המלך.</p>	<p><b>19</b> And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, and Mordecai sat in the king's gate--</p>
<p>כ אין אסתר, מגדת מולדתה ואת-עמה, כאשר צוה עליה, מרדכי; ואת-מאמר מרדכי אסתר עשה, כאשר היתה באמנה אתו. {ס}</p>	<p><b>20</b> Esther had not yet made known her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him-- {S}</p>

### 15. Talmud Bavli, 13a

ויעש המלך משתה גדול עבד משתנה ולא גליא ליה דלי כרגא ולא גליא ליה שדר פרדישני ולא גליא ליה

The verse states: “**Then the king made a great feast** for all his princes and his servants, even Esther’s feast” ([Esther 2:18](#)). The Gemara explains that this was part of an attempt to have Esther reveal her true identity. **He made a great feast in her honor, but she did not reveal her identity to him. He lowered the taxes [karga] in her name, but still she did not reveal it to him. He sent gifts [pardishenei] to the ministers in her name, but even so she did not reveal it to him.**

ובהקבץ בתולות שנית וגו' אזיל שקל עצה ממרדכי אמר אין אישה מתקנאה אלא ביהוה חבירתה ואפילו הכי לא גליא ליה דכתיב אין אסתר מגדת מולדתה וגו'

The verse states: “**And when the virgins were gathered together the second time** and Mordecai sat in the king’s gate” ([Esther 2:19](#)). The Gemara explains: The reason Ahasuerus gathered the women together was that **he went and took advice from Mordecai** as to what he should do to get Esther to reveal her identity. Mordecai said to him: As a rule, **a woman is jealous only of the thigh of another woman**. Therefore, you should take for yourself additional women. **But even so she did not reveal her origins to him, as it is written: “Esther had not yet made known her kindred nor her people”** ([Esther 2:20](#)).

אמר רבי אלעזר מאי דכתיב

§ [Rabbi Elazar](#) said: What is the meaning of that which is written:

לא יגרע מצדיק עיניו בשכר צניעות שהיתה בה ברחל זכתה ויצא ממנה שאול ובשכר צניעות שהיה בו בשאול זכה ויצאת ממנו אסתר

“**He withdraws not His eyes from the righteous;** but with kings upon the throne He establishes them forever, and they are exalted” ([Job 36:7](#))? This teaches that **in reward for the modesty shown by Rachel she merited that Saul, who was also modest, should descend from her, and in reward for the modesty shown by Saul, he merited that Esther should descend from him.**

## Mordechai the Public Figure



### 16. Esther 8:10-17

<p><b>י</b> ויכתוב, בשם המלך אחשוורוש, ויחתם, בטבעת המלך; וישלח ספרים ביד הרצים בסוסים רכבי הרקש, האחשתרנים--בגני, הרמכים.</p>	<p><b>10</b> And they wrote in the name of king Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, riding on swift steeds that were used in the king's service, bred of the stud;</p>
<p><b>יא</b> אשר נתן המלך ליהודים אשר בכל-עיר-ועיר, להקהל ולעמד על-נפשם--להשמיד ולהרג ולאבד את-כל-חיל עם ומדינה הצרים אתם, טף ונשים; ושללם, לבוז.</p>	<p><b>11</b> that the king had granted the Jews that were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, and to slay, and to cause to perish, all the forces of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey,</p>
<p><b>יב</b> ביום אחד, בכל-מדינות המלך אחשוורוש--בשלושה עשר לחדש שנים-עשר, הוא-חדש אדר.</p>	<p><b>12</b> upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.</p>
<p><b>יג</b> פתשגן הכתב, להנתן דת בכל-מדינה ומדינה, גלוי, לְכָל-הָעַמִּים; ולהיות היהודיים (היהודים) עתודים (עתידים) ליום הזה, להנקם מאיביהם.</p>	<p><b>13</b> The copy of the writing, to be given out for a decree in every province, was to be published unto all the peoples, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.</p>
<p><b>יד</b> הרצים רכבי הרקש, האחשתרנים, יצאו מבבלים ודחופים, בדבר המלך; והדת נתנה, בשושן הבירה. {ס}</p>	<p><b>14</b> So the posts that rode upon swift steeds that were used in the king's service went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment; and the decree was given out in Shushan the castle. {S}</p>
<p><b>טו</b> ומרדכי יצא מלפני המלך, בלבוש מלכות תכלת וחור, ועטרת זהב גדולה, ותכריף בוץ וארגמן; והעיר שושן, צהלה ושמחה.</p>	<p><b>15</b> And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan shouted and was glad.</p>
<p><b>טז</b> ליהודים, היתה אורה ושמחה, וישון, ויקר.</p>	<p><b>16</b> The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour.</p>



זי ובכל-מדינה ומדינה ובכל-עיר ועיר, מקום  
 אשר דבר-המלך ודתו מגיע, שמחה וששון  
 ליהודים, משתה ויום טוב; ורבים מעמי הארץ,  
 מתיהדים--כי-נפל פחד-היהודים, עליהם.

17 And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's  
 commandment and his decree came, the Jews had gladness and joy, a feast  
 and a good day. And many from among the peoples of the land became  
 Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen upon them.

17. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 16b

ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר אמר רב יהודה אורה זו תורה וכן הוא אומר כי נר מצנה ותורה אור שמחה זה יום טוב וכן הוא  
 אומר ושמחת בחגך וששון זו מילה וכן הוא אומר שש אנכי על אמרתך

§ The Gemara returns to its explanation of the Megilla. The verse states: **“The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor”** (Esther 8:16). **Rav Yehuda said: “Light”**; this is referring to the **Torah** that they once again studied. **And similarly it says: “For the mitzva is a lamp and the Torah is light”** (Proverbs 6:23). **“Gladness” [simha]**; this is referring to the **Festivals** that they once again observed. **And similarly it says: “And you shall be glad [vesamakhta] on your Festival”** (Deuteronomy 16:14). **“Joy” [sason]**; this is referring to **circumcision**, as they once again circumcised their sons. **And similarly it says: “I rejoice [sas] at Your word”** (Psalms 119:162), which the Sages understood as referring to David’s rejoicing over the mitzva of circumcision.

ויקר אלו תפלין וכן הוא אומר וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליה וראו ממך ומנבא רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר אלו תפלין שבראש

**“Honor”**; this is referring to **phylacteries**, which they once again donned. **And similarly it says: “And all peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord; and they will be afraid of you”** (Deuteronomy 28:10). **And it was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Eliezer the Great said: This** is referring to the **phylacteries worn on the head**. Haman had banned the fulfillment of all the mitzvot mentioned, but upon Haman’s demise the Jews returned to their observance.

Epilogue: Mordechai the political leader

18. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 16b

כי מרדכי היהודי משנה למלך אששנרוש וגדול ליהודים ורצוי לרוב אחיו לרוב אחיו ולא לכל אחיו מלמד שפירשו ממנו מקצת סנהדרין

The verse states: **“For Mordecai the Jew was second to the king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted by the majority of his brethren”** (Esther 10:3). The Gemara comments: The verse indicates that Mordecai was accepted only **“By the majority of his brethren,” but not by all his brethren**. This teaches that some members of the Sanhedrin parted from him, because he occupied himself with community needs, and was therefore compelled to neglect his Torah study. They felt that this was a mistake and that he should have remained active on the Sanhedrin.

אמר רב יוסף גדול תלמוד תורה יותר מהצלת נפשות דמעיקרא חשיב ליה למרדכי בתר ארבעה ולבסוף בתר חמשה מעיקרא כתיב  
 אשר באו עם זרובבל ישוע נחמיה שרניה רעליה מרדכי בלשן ולבסוף כתיב הבאים עם זרובבל ישוע נחמיה שרניה רעמיה נחמני  
 מרדכי בלשן

**Rav Yosef said: Studying Torah is greater than saving lives, as initially**, when listing the Jewish leaders who came to Eretz Yisrael, **Mordecai was mentioned after four** other people, **but at the end** he was listed **after five**. This is taken to indicate that his involvement in governmental affairs instead of in Torah study lowered his stature one notch. The Gemara proves this: **At first it is written: “Who came with Zerubbabel,**

Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan” (Ezra 2:2); but in the end in a later list it is written: “Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahmani, Mordecai, Bilshan” (Nehemiah 7:7).

19. Hamodia, January 27th 2021

What does the *Rosh Yeshivah* feel about the assertion that some make that we owe President Trump a measure of *hakaras hatov* for the many good things he has done?

The truth is that I, too, feel gratitude for some of what the President has done, which has helped both *yechidim*, *Klal Yisrael*, and especially what he has done for Israel. But we have to understand a fundamental concept when it comes to the notion of *hakaras hatov*.

More than a century ago, there was a yeshivah that went through a difficult period, and the leader of another yeshivah helped them out by supplying staff and *talmidim* to establish the said yeshivah and its leader on firm footing. As time passed, the *Rosh Yeshivah* called in the visiting *talmidim* and thanked them but told them it was time for them to leave, since his path in running his yeshivah diverged from their path.

The guests expressed surprise. “After everything we did for you, where is your *hakaras hatov*?” they asked. The *Rosh Yeshivah*’s answer applies to our situation as well. “In the entire *inyan* of *hakaras hatov*, we only find that the receiver of a favor must recognize and thank the giver. However, we do not find that he must give back the favor. If I were to keep you here in my yeshivah, it would terminate the core of my yeshivah as I envision it. That is not included in *hakaras hatov*.”

This idea applies here as well. As I said, we certainly appreciate the acts that President Trump has



done, and of course we internalize that the *Eibershter* chose him to accomplish what he did, and we are grateful to him for that. But *hakaras hatov* does not obligate us to return and undo the *tovah* that was done. The public exhibition of blind adulation toward the President with the refusal to recognize his shortcomings during the past four years and over the last three months is difficult to understand, and the image we are presenting to the public at large impairs our ability to thrive in this *malchus shel chessed*.

In addition, as I've said many times, it is vital for us to remember that we remain in *galus*, and we should not take a public role in determining the political direction of the country.