

Pre-Purim Learnathon 5780

Dedicated in Memory of Paul Forman, ז"ל



Megilat E-Satire
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1. Adele Berlin, Esther, The JPS Bible Commentary, Philadelphia 2002, p. XVII, cited in https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-27-literary-carnavalesque-theological-carnavalesque#_ftn3

“It is a comedy, a book meant to be funny, to provoke laughter. The book of Esther is the most humorous of the books in the bible, amusing throughout and at certain points uproariously funny... The comic aspects of the book are not incidental, merely to provide comic relief; they are the essence of the book. They define the genre of the book, and thus set the parameters according to which we should read it. We cannot appreciate the story fully unless we realize that it is meant to be funny.”

The Royal Feast of Insecurity

2. Esther Chapter 1:1-8 (JPS Tanakh 1985 translation)

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהַדּוֹ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא קָשְׁתָהּ | הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ עַל כֶּסֶף מַלְכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוֹשׁן הַבִּירָה: בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חֵיל | פָּרַס וּמְדֵי הַפְּרָתִימִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת לִפְנָיו: בְּהָרֵאתוֹ אֶת־עֹשֶׁר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת־יָקָר תַּפְאֵרַת גְּדוּלָתוֹ | מִיָּמִים רַבִּים שְׁמוֹנִים וּמֵאֶת יוֹם: וּבְמִלּוֹאת | הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל־הָעָם הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוֹשׁן הַבִּירָה לְמַגְדֹּל וְעַד־קֶטֶן מִשְׁתֵּה שְׁבַע־יָמִים בַּחֲצַר גִּגְתוֹ בֵּיתוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ: חוּר | כָּרֶפֶס וְתַכְלֵת אַחוּז בַּחבִּל־בָּוָץ וְאַרְגָּמָן עַל־גִּלְגָּלִי כֶסֶף וְעַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ מְטוֹת | זָהָב וְכֶסֶף עַל רַצְפֵּת בַּהֲטוֹשׁשׁ וְדָר וְסַחֲרֹת: וְהַשְּׂקוֹת בְּכָל־יָהָב וְכֵלִים מְפָלִים שׁוֹנִים וַיִּין מַלְכוּת רַב פִּיגְד הַמֶּלֶךְ: וְהַשְׂתִּיָּה כָדַת אֵין אֲנִס כִּי־כֹן | יֵסֵד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כְּלָרֵב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּרָצוֹן אִישׁ־וְאִישׁ:

It happened in the days of Ahasuerus—that Ahasuerus who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia. In those days, when King Ahasuerus occupied the royal throne in the fortress Shushan, in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all the officials and courtiers—the administration of Persia and Media, the nobles and the governors of the provinces in his service. For no fewer than a hundred and eighty days he **displayed the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty**. At the end of this period, the king gave a banquet for seven days in the court of the king’s palace garden for all the people who lived in the fortress Shushan, high and low alike. [There were hangings of] **white cotton and blue wool, caught up by cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns; and there were couches of gold and silver on a pavement of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mosaics**. Royal wine was served in abundance, as befits a king, in golden beakers, beakers of varied design. And the rule for the drinking was, “No restrictions!” For the king had given orders to every palace steward to comply with each man’s wishes.

3. Talmud, Megilla 11a (William Davidson Edition translation)

אחשורוש אמר רב אחיו של ראש וכן גילו של ראש אחיו של ראש אחיו של נבוכדנצר הרשע שנקרא ראש שנאמר (דניאל ב, לח) אנת הוא רישא די דהבא בן גילו של ראש הוא הרג הוא ביקש להרוג הוא החריב הוא ביקש להחריב שנאמר (עזרא ד, ו) ובמלכות אחשורוש בתחלת מלכותו כתבו שטנה על יושבי יהודה וירושלם ושמואל אמר שהושחרו פניהם של ישראל בימיו כשולי קדרה ורבי יוחנן אמר כל שזוכרו אמר אח לראשו ורבי חנינא אמר שהכל נעשו רשין בימיו שנאמר (אסתר י, א) וישם המלך אחשורוש מס הוא אחשורוש הוא ברשעו מתחילתו ועד סופו The Gemara continues with its explanation of the book of Esther, beginning with a discussion of the name Ahasuerus. Rav said: The name should be viewed as a contraction: The brother of the head [ahiv shel rosh] and of the same character as the head [ben gilo shel rosh]. Rav explains: The brother of the head, i.e., the brother of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, who is called “head,” as it is stated: “You are the head of gold” (Daniel 2: 38). Of the same character as the head, for he, Nebuchadnezzar, killed the Jews, and he, Ahasuerus, sought to kill them. He destroyed the Temple, and he sought to destroy the foundations for the Temple laid by Zerubbabel, as it is stated: “And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote to him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 4: 6), and he ordered that the construction of the Temple cease. And Shmuel said: The name Ahasuerus should be understood in the sense of black [shahor], as the face of the Jewish people was blackened in his days like the bottom of a pot. And Rabbi Yohanan said a different explanation: Everyone who recalled him said: “Woe upon his head” [ah lerosho]. And Rabbi Hanina said: The name alludes to the fact that everyone became poor [rash] in his days, as it is stated: “And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land” (Esther 10: 1). The Gemara continues: “This is [hu] Ahasuerus” (Esther 1: 1); the term hu, this is, comes to teach that he remained as he was in his wickedness from beginning to end.

Queen Vashti’s Modesty?

4. Esther Chapter 1:8-12 (JPS Tanakh 1985 translation)

גַּם וְשִׁתִּי הַמֶּלֶכָה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֵּה נָשִׁים בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ: בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כָטוּב לְבִי־הַמֶּלֶךְ בָּגְנוּ אֶמֶר לְמַהוֹמֵן בְּתִתָּא חֲרֹבוּנָא בְּגִתָּא וְאַבְגָּתָא זֹתָר וְכָרְפֶס שְׁבַע־יָמִים הַסְרִיסִים הַמְשֻׁרְתִּים אֶת־פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ: לְהַבִּיא אֶת־נִשְׁתֵּי הַמֶּלֶכָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּכַתֵּר מַלְכוּת לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יָפְיָהּ כִּי־טוֹבֵת מְרָאָה הִיא: וְתַמְלֹן הַמֶּלֶכָה וְשִׁתִּי לְבוֹא בְּדָבָר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בִּיד הַסְרִיסִים וַיִּקְצָף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד וַחֲמָתוֹ בַּעֲרָה בּוֹ:

In addition, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for women, in the royal palace of King Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs in attendance on King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing a royal diadem, to display her beauty to the peoples and the officials; for she was a beautiful woman. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs. The king was greatly incensed, and his fury burned within him.

5. Talmud, Megilla 12a- 12b (William Davidson Edition Translation)

(אסתר א, ט) גם ושת המלכה עשתה משתה נשים בית המלכות בית הנשים מיבעי ליה אמר רבא שניהן לדבר עבירה נתכוונו היינו דאמרי אינשי איהו בקרי ואתתיה בבוציני. ביום השביעי כטוב לב המלך ביין, אטו עד השתא לא טב לביה בחמרא? אמר רבא: יום השביעי שבת היה, שישראל אוכלין ושותין, מתחילין בדברי תורה ובדברי תשבחות. אבל אומות העולם שאוכלין ושותין - אין מתחילין אלא בדברי תיפלות. וכן בסעודתו של אותו רשע, הללו אומרים: מדיות נאות, והללו אומרים: פרסיות נאות. אמר להם אחשורוש: כלי שאני משתמש בו אינו לא מדיי ולא פרסי אלא כשדיי, רצונכם לראותה? - אמרו לו: אין, ובלבד שתהא ערומה. שבמדה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו. מלמד שהיתה ושתה הרשעה מביאה בנות ישראל ומפשיטין ערומות ועושה בהן מלאכה בשבת. היינו דכתיב אחר הדברים האלה כשך חמת המלך אחשורוש זכר את ושת ואת אשר עשתה ואת אשר נגזר עליה, כשם שעשתה - כך נגזר עליה. ותמאן המלכה ושת, מכדי פריצתא הואי, דאמר מר: שניהן לדבר עבירה נתכוונו, מאי טעמא לא אתאי? אמר רבי יוסי בר חנינא: מלמד שפרחה בה צרעת במתניתא תנא: [בא גבריאלי ועשה לה זנב].
The verse states: "Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women, in the royal house, which belonged to King Ahasuerus" (Esther 1: 9). The Gemara questions why she held the feast in the royal house, a place of men, rather than in the women's house, where it should have been. Rava said in response: The two of them had sinful intentions. Ahasuerus wished to fornicate with the women, and Vashti wished to fornicate with the men. This explains the folk saying that people say: He with pumpkins and his wife with zucchinis. The verse states: "On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine" (Esther 1: 10). The Gemara asks: Is that to say that until now his heart was not merry with wine? Did it take seven days for him to achieve merriment? Rava said: The seventh day was Shabbat, when the difference between the Jewish people and the gentiles is most apparent. On Shabbat, when the Jewish people eat and drink, they begin by occupying themselves with words of Torah and words of praise for G-d. But the nations of the world, when they eat and drink, they begin only with words of licentiousness. The Gemara continues to detail what occurred at the feast. So too, at the feast of that wicked man, Ahasuerus, when the men began to converse, some said: The Median women are the most beautiful, while others said: The Persian women are the most beautiful. Ahasuerus said to them: The vessel that I use, i.e., my wife, is neither Median nor Persian, but rather Chaldean. Do you wish to see her? They said to him: Yes, provided that she be naked, for we wish to see her without any additional adornments. The Gemara comments: Vashti was punished in this humiliating way for it is with the measure that a man measures to others that he himself is measured. In other words, G-d punishes individuals in line with their transgressions, measure for measure. This teaches that the wicked Vashti would take the daughters of Israel, and strip them naked, and make them work on Shabbat. Therefore, it was decreed that she be brought before the king naked, on Shabbat. This is as it is written: "After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her" (Esther 2: 1). That is to say, just as she had done with the young Jewish women, so it was decreed upon her. The verse states: "But the queen Vashti refused to come" (Esther 1: 12). The Gemara asks: Since she was immodest, as the Master said above: The two of them had sinful intentions, what is the reason that she did not come? Rabbi Yosei bar Hanina said: This teaches that she broke out in leprosy, and therefore she was embarrassed to expose herself publicly.

The "Rise" of Haman

6. Esther 3:1-2 (JPS Tanakh 1985 translation)

אחר | הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשורוש את המן ברהמדתא האגגי וינשאהו וישם את-כסאו מעל כלהשרים אשר אתו: כלעבדי המלך אשר-בשער המלך כרעים ומשתחיים להמן כי-כן צוה-לו המלך ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה:

Some time afterward, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low.

7. Esther Rabbah 7:6-7

אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשורוש את המן ברהמדתא וגו' (אסתר ג, א), זהו שאמר הכתוב (תהלים לו, כ): כי רשעים יאבדו ואיבי ה' ביקר ברים. שאין מפסמין אותו לטובתו אלא לטבתה, כך המן הרשע לא נתגדל אלא למפלתו, משל לאדם שהיתה לו סניחה ונחמורה וחזירה, והיה נותן לחזירה בלא מדה, לחמורה ולסניחה במדה. אמרה סניחה לחמורה מה שוטה זה עושה, אנו שאנו עושין מלאכתו של בעל הבית נותן לנו במדה, ולחזירה שהיא בטלה, שלא במדה. אמרה לה תבוא השעה ואת רואה במפלתה, שאין מאכילין אותה יותר לכבודה, אלא לרעתה. כיון שבא קלנדס, מיד נטלו לחזירה ונחרוה, התחילו נותנין שעורים לפני בתה של חמורה, והיתה מנשבת בהן ולא אכלה, אמרה לה אמה בתי לא המאכל גורם אלא הבטלה גורמת כך, לפי שקתוב: וישם את כסאו מעל כל השרים אשר אתו, לפיכך ויתלו את המן.

Some time afterward, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha etc. This is the meaning of the following verse (Tehillim 37: 20): For the wicked shall be destroyed and the enemies of the Lord like precious cows. For they don't fatten them for their own good but for slaughter. So too, Haman the wicked only became great so that he could fall. A parable can be drawn to a man who had a foal, a donkey, and a pig, and he fed the pig without a measure, and the foal and donkey with a measure. The foal said to the donkey: What is this fool doing? We who do the work of the master of the house only get fed a measured amount, and the pig who is idle get's fed without measure! She said to her: The time will come and you will see her fall, for they don't feed her for her honour, but for her detriment. When the holiday came, they immediate took the pig and slaughtered her, they began to put barley in front of the donkey's daughter, and she blew them away and didn't eat. Her mother said to her: My daughter the food isn't the cause, the idleness is. Since it writes: "He put his seat above the all the officers that were with him therefore: they hung Haman.

דָּבַר אַחַר, אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אָמַר רַבִּי לֵוִי זֶה שְׁאֵמַר הַפְּתוּב (תהלים צב, ח): בְּפֶרֶחַ רִשְׁעִים כְּמוֹ עֵשֶׂב וַיִּצְצוּ כָּל פְּעָלֵי אָוֶן, מִה כְּתִיב בְּסוֹף קְרִיָּה: לְהַשְׁמֵדָם עַד־עַד, לֹא נִתְגַּדַּל הֶמֶן אֶלָּא לְרַעְתּוֹ, וְלִמָּה גָּדְלוֹ, מִשָּׁל לְגוֹלְיָיִר שֶׁקָּלַל לְבָנוּ שֶׁל מֶלֶךְ, אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אִם אֲנִי הוֹרְגוּ הַכֹּל אוֹמְרִים גּוֹלְיָיִר הִרְגוּ, עֲשֵׂה אוֹתוֹ טְרִיכּוֹנוֹס, וְאַחַר כֵּן עֲשֵׂה אוֹתוֹ הַגְּמוּן, וְאַחַר כֵּן הִתִּיז אֶת רֹאשׁוֹ. כֵּן אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֵלֹהֵינוּ הֶמֶן כְּשִׁירָד וְעַץ לְאַחֲשׁוּרֹשׁ לְבַטֵּל בְּנֵן בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, לֹא הִיָּה מִי יוֹדְעוֹ, אֶלָּא יִתְגַּדַּל וְאַחַר כֵּן יִתְלַה, לְפִיכֵן וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת כְּסָאוֹ מַעַל כָּל הַשָּׂרִים, וְאַחַר כֵּן וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת הֶמֶן, הִרִי אוֹיְבֵי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמַפְלֵתוֹ הֵן מִתְגַּדְּלִין, וְכִתִּיב (איוב יב, כג): מִשְׁגִּיא לְגוֹיִם וַיִּאֲבָדָם.

Another explanation, “some time afterword”, Rabbi Levi said: This is the meaning of the following verse which writes (Tehillim 92,8): when the wicked sprout like grass, and the performers of iniquity bud. What does it write in the end of the verse?: to destroy them for eternity. Haman only became great for his detriment. Why did He make him great? A parable can be drawn to a weakling who cursed the son of the king. The king said: If I kill him everyone will say I killed a weakling. He made him an officer, and then made him a general, and then cut off his head. So too, the Holy One Blessed be He said: if Haman was killed when he went down and advised to Ahasuerus to abolish the construction of the temple, no one would do him. Rather he shall become great and afterward he shall hang. Therefore: “He put his throne above all the officers, and afterward “They hanged Haman”. Behold the enemies of the Holy One Blessed be He become great so they can fall. As it is written (Iyov 12: 23): He makes nations great and destroys them.

8. Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 50 (translation from Gerald Friedlander)

בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת המלך, ואותה הלילה נד כסאו של מלך מלכי המלכים הב"ה, ונדדה המלך שבארץ ועמד משינתו, שראה בחלומו להמן שנטל את הסיף להרגו ונבהל ועמד משינתו, ואמר לבני המן שמי וספרי כותבי ספרי המלך לקרות בספרים ולראות ולידע מה שעברו עליו, ופתחו הספרים וימצאו הדבר שהגיד מרדכי ולא היו רוצים לקרות אותה, והיו גוללים את הספרים, אמר להם המלך קראו מה שכתוב לפניכם ולא היו רוצין לקרות, והכתובין הם נקראים לפני המלך מאליהם, שנאמר ויהיו נקראים לפני המלך, ויהיו קוראין (את) [אין] כתוב כאן, אלא ויהיו נקראים, אמר המלך לעבדיו קראו לי להמן, אמרו לו הרי הוא עומד בחוץ, אמר המלך יבא ויכנס לפני, ובא המן לפני המלך אמר לו המלך אני רוצה לגדל ולרומם לאיש אחד שנתן אלי החיות מה לעשות לו אמר המן בלבו אי"ן אין חפץ המלך לעשות יקר וגדולה יותר ממני, וכל זרעו של עמלק אין מגלין הסוד בפניהם ואומרים בלבן, שנאמר ויאמר המן בלבו, אמר המן אדבר דברים שאהיה מלך כמהו, אמר לו אם רצית לעשות יקר לאיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו ויבאו לבוש מלכות אשר לבש בו המלך ביום שהמליכוך וסוס שרכבת בו ביום שמלכת ואת הכתר שנתן בראשך ביום שמלכת, וכעס המלך על הכתר הרבה מאד, אמר המלך הרשע הזה לא דיו שאמר אלי על המלכות ועל הסוס אלא אף על הכתר שבראשי, אם כן מה הניח לי, כיון שראה המן שכעס המלך על הכתר, חזר ואמר ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים, אמר לו המלך צא ועשה כן למרדכי, שמע המן ונבהל ואמר לו אדני המלך הרבה מרדכי יש, אמר לו מרדכי היהודי, אמר לו יש יהודים הרבה, אמר לו היושב בשער המלך, אמר לו אדני המלך לא הייתי סבור כי אם על שר גדול הייתי אומר, לזה תן לו שדות וכרמים ודיו, אבל לזה מה יועיל לו, אמר לו עשה כאשר דברת, וגם אני יכול לתת לו כל מה שגזרת, אמר לו אדני המלך אתן לך אחד מבני הגדולים ויעשה לו ככל מה שגזרת עלי, אמר לו חיי ראשי ומלכותי לך נאה לעשות כן. מיד לקח המן הלבוש והסוס והלך אצל מרדכי ושאל לו בשלום, אמר לו מרדכי אין שלום אמר ה' לרשעים, אמר לו המן קום לבוש פורפוריון של מלך, אמר לו רשע אין אתה רואה כי אני לבוש שק ויושב על האפר ממה שעשית לי, אלא הולכני לבית המרחץ ואחר כך אלבש פורפוריון של מלך, מה עשתה אסתר צותה לבל יעשה מרחץ ואם יאמר המן לבעלי המרחץ להדליקו אל ישמעו לו, הלך המן בכל המרחצאות ולא מצא והדליקו בעל כרחו הוא בעצמו, ושלה לבנו הגדול לקרא את מרדכי למרחץ, לקח מרדכי והכה אותו ברגליו, אמר לו ולמה לא בא אביך בעצמו והלא עבד הוא לי, הלך אצל אביו ואמר לו, הלך הוא בעצמו בעל כרחו ונכנס עמו לבית המרחץ וגלח את ראשו ויצא והלבשו אמר עלה ורכוב על הסוס, אמר לו מענוי הצום אין בי כח לעלות ולרכוב על הסוס, מה עשה המן השפיל את עצמו ונתן מרדכי רגלו על צוארו ועלה ורכב על הסוס, ומדמי עליה חד כרעא בטש ביה בכרעא אחריתי, אמר לו המן והלא כתוב בתורה בנפול אויבך אל תשמח, אמר לו רשע בישראל כתוב זה, אבל באומות העולם ואתה על במותימו תדרוך, ובא מרדכי אצל המלך, והוא מכריז עליו ככה יעשה לאיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו, וישב לו במושב כבודו על שער המלך, והמן נדחף אל ביתו אבל וחפוי ראש על מה שאירע לו.

“On that night the king's sleep fled” (Esth. 6: 1). That night the throne of the King who is King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, became unsteady, because He saw that Israel was in great distress. The sleep of the king on earth fled, for he had seen in his dream Haman taking the sword to slay him; and he became agitated and arose from his sleep, and he told the sons of Haman, the scribes, to read in the books so as to see what had happened to him. They opened the books, and found the incident which Mordecai had told, but they did not wish to read this, and they rolled up the scrolls. The king said to them: Read ye what is written before you. But they were unwilling to read, and the writing was read (of its own account) by itself, as it is said, “And they were read before the king” (ibid.). It is not written here, “They were reading,” but “They were read.” The king spake to his servants: Call ye Haman to me. They said to him: Behold, he is standing outside. The king said: The thing is true which I saw in my dream; he has come only in this hour to slay me. He said: Let him come in. He entered before the king. The king said to him: I wish to exalt and aggrandize a certain man; what shall be done to him? Haman said in his heart, for the seed of Esau speak in their hearts, but never reveal their secret with their mouths, as it is said, “And Haman said in his heart” (Esth. 6: 6). Haman said in his heart: He does not desire to exalt any other man except me. I will speak words so that I shall be a king just as he is. He said to him: Let them bring the apparel which the king wore on the day of the coronation, and (let them bring) the horse upon which the king rode on the coronation day, and the crown which was put upon the head of the king on the day of coronation. The king was exceedingly angry because of the crown. The king said: It does not suffice this villain, but he must even desire the crown which is upon my head. Haman saw that the king was angry because of the crown; he said: “And let the apparel and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes” (Esth. 6: 9). (The king) said to him: Go, and do thus to Mordecai. As soon as Haman heard this he became greatly agitated, and he said to him: My lord, O king! There are very many named Mordecai. The king answered: “The Jew.” (Haman) said to him: There are very many Jews. The king said to him: “He who sits at the king's gate” (Esth. 6: 10). Haman took the apparel and the horse and went to Mordecai. (Haman) said to him: Arise, and put on the purple of the king. (Mordecai) said to him: Villain! Dost thou not know that for three days I have put on sack-cloth with ashes, sitting on the ashes, because of that which thou hast done to me? Now take me to the bath-house, and afterwards will I put on the purple of the king. And he washed him and dressed him. (Haman) said to him: Mount and ride upon the horse. He said to (Haman): On account of the affliction of the fast I have no strength to mount and ride upon the horse. What did Haman do? He lowered himself, and Mordecai put his foot upon his neck, and he mounted and rode upon the horse. Mordecai said: Blessed be the Omnipresent, who hath not let aught of His words fall to the earth, to fulfil that which is said, “But thou shalt tread upon their high places” (Deut. 33: 29). Mordecai betook himself to his seat of honour at the king's gate, whilst Haman was hurried along, and he went “to his house mourning and having his head covered” (Esth. 6: 12), because of that which had happened to him.

9. Esther 9:26 (JPS Tanakh 1985 translation)

על־פֿן קָרְאוּ לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פּוּרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפֻּר עַל־פֿן עַל־כִּלְדִּבְרֵי הָאֲגֵרֶת הַזֹּאת וַיִּמְהַרְאוּ עַל־כִּכָּה וַיְמַהֲרֵם הַגִּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם:

For that reason these days were named Purim, after pur. In view, then, of all the instructions in the said letter and of what they had experienced in that matter and what had befallen them,

Who is the megilla about?

10. Talmud, Megilla 19a (William Davidson Edition translation)

ומהיכן קורא אדם את המגילה ויוצא בה י"ח ר"מ אומר כולה ר' יהודה אומר מאיש יהודי רבי יוסי אומר מאחר הדברים האלה... מהיכן קורא אדם את המגילה וכו': תניא רשב"י אומר מבלילה ההוא א"ר יוחנן וכולן מקרא אחד דרשו ותכתב אסתר המלכה ומרדכי היהודי את כל תוקף מאן דאמר כולה תוקפו של אחשוורוש ומאן דאמר מאיש יהודי תוקפו של מרדכי ומ"ד מאחר הדברים האלה תוקפו של המן ומ"ד מבלילה ההוא תוקפו של נס רב הונא אמר מהכא ומה ראו על ככה ומה הגיע אליהם מ"ד כולה מה ראה אחשוורוש שנשתמש בכלים של בית המקדש על ככה משום דחשיב שבעים שנין ולא איפרוק ומה הגיע אליהם דקטל ושתי ומ"ד מאיש יהודי מה ראה מרדכי דאיכני בהמן על ככה דשוי נפשיה ע"ז ומה הגיע אליהם דאתרחיש ניסא ומ"ד מאחר הדברים האלה מה ראה המן שנתקנא בכל היהודים על ככה משום דמרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה ומה הגיע אליהם ותלו אותו ואת בניו על העץ ומ"ד מבלילה ההוא מה ראה אחשוורוש להביא את ספר הזכרונות על ככה דזמינתיה אסתר להמן בהדיה ומה הגיע אליהם דאתרחיש ניסא א"ר חלבו אמר רב חמא בר גוריא אמר רב הלכה כדברי האומר כולה ואפי' למאן דאמר מאיש יהודי צריכה שתהא כתובה כולה

The mishna teaches that three Sages disagree about the question: Beginning from where must a person read the Megilla in order to fulfill his obligation? It is taught in a baraita that there is a fourth opinion as well ... Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai says: One must start to read from "On that night" (Esther 6: 1). Rabbi Yohanan said: And all of these tanna'im, in arriving at their respective opinions, were expounding the same verse. As it is stated: "Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote about all the acts of power to confirm this second letter of Purim" (Esther 9: 29). The one who said that the Megilla must be read in its entirety interprets "acts of power" as referring to the power of Ahasuerus, and so the Megilla must be read from the beginning, where the power of Ahasuerus is recounted. And the one who said that it needs to be read from "There was a certain Jew" explains that "acts of power" is referring to the power of Mordecai. And the one who said that it needs to be read from "After these things" maintains that "acts of power" is referring to the power of Haman. And the one who said that it needs to be read from "On that night" understands that the expression is referring to the power of the miracle, which began on that night when Ahasuerus could not sleep, and therefore one must begin reading the Megilla from there. Rav Huna said: The four Sages derived their respective opinions from here: "Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, and of that which they saw concerning this matter, and that which had befallen them, the Jews ordained...that they would keep these two days" (Esther 9: 26–27). Rav Huna continued: The one who said that the Megilla must be read in its entirety explains the verse as follows: "They saw" refers to what Ahasuerus saw, in that he used the vessels of the Temple. "Concerning this matter" was because he had calculated seventy years from the Babylonian exile and the Jews were still not redeemed, and he consequently thought that they would never enjoy deliverance. "And that which had befallen them" is referring to the fact that he had killed Vashti. Since the Megilla was written and continues to be read in order to inform future generations of all these events and what had happened to the people who were involved, and these are detailed at the beginning of the Megilla, it must be read in its entirety. And the one who said that the Megilla needs to be read from "There was a certain Jew" interprets this verse as follows: That which Mordecai "saw" in that he acted so zealously concerning Haman. "Concerning this matter" was because Haman had made himself an object of idol worship. "And that which had befallen them" is referring to the fact that a miracle took place. Therefore one must read the Megilla from "There was a certain man," where all this is recounted. And the one who said that it needs to be read from "After these things" interprets the verse in this way: That which Haman "saw" in that he became incensed with all the Jews. "Concerning this matter" was because "Mordecai did not bow down, nor prostrate himself before him" (Esther 3: 2). "And that which had befallen them" is referring to the fact that "he and his sons were hanged on the gallows" (Esther 9: 25). Accordingly, the Megilla must be read from the first mention of Haman. And the one who said that the Megilla must be read from "On that night" offers the following explanation: That which Ahasuerus "saw" in that he commanded to bring the book of chronicles before him. "Concerning this matter" was because Esther had invited Haman along with him to the banquet she made. "And that which had befallen them" is referring to the fact that a miracle took place. And therefore one must read the Megilla from "On that night the king could not sleep and he commanded to bring the book of chronicles." Rabbi Helbo said that Rav Hama bar Gurya said that Rav said: The halakha is in accordance with the statement of the one who says that the Megilla must be read in its entirety. And moreover, even according to the one who said that it need be read only from "There was a certain Jew" and onward, the Megilla itself must nevertheless be written in its entirety.

Who Was Achashverosh?

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1. Esther 1:1 (chabad.org tr. for all Tanach citations)

וַיְהִי בִימֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הָיָה אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהוּדוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שִׁבְעַתְּשָׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה.

Now it came to pass in the days of Achashverosh -- he was the Achashverosh who reigned from Hodu to Cush, one hundred twenty-seven provinces.

Talmudic chronology:

2. Artscroll Tractate Megillah 11b, note 14 (adapted)

King	Reign (secular calendar)	Country	Comment
Nebuchadnezzar	606-562 BCE	Babylon	Destroyed Jerusalem (3338/587 BCE)
Evil Merodach	562-539 BCE	Babylon	Freed King Yechonyah
Belshazar	539-536 BCE	Babylon	Last Babylonian king
Darius the Mede	536-535 BCE	Persia-Media	Defeated Belshazar
Cyrus	535-532 BCE	Persia-Media	Authorized return of exiles and building of the Temple
Achashverosh	532-518 BCE	Persia-Media	Husband of Esther
Darius the Persian	518-483 BCE	Persia-Media	Esther's son: Authorized Temple's completion (3412/516 BCE)

Ezra's chronology

3. Ezra 4:5-7

וּסְכָרִים עָלֵיהֶם יוֹעֲצִים לְהַפֵּר עֲצָתָם כָּל־יְמֵי כוֹרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס וְעַד־מְלָכֹת דְרָגוּשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס: וּבְמַלְכוּת אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ בְּתַחֲלַת מַלְכוּתוֹ כָּתְבוּ שְׂטוּהָ עַל־יְשֵׁבֵי יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם: וּבִימֵי אַרְתַּחְשֶׁשְׁתָּא כָּתַב בְּשָׁלֵם מִתְרַדָּת טְבָאֵל וּשְׁאָר כְּגוֹתָיו (כְּתִיב כְּגוֹתָו) עַל אַרְתַּחְשֶׁשְׁתָּא מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס וְכָתַב הַנְּשִׁתוֹן כְּתוּב אַרְמִית וּמְתַרְגָּם אַרְמִית.

And they would hire advisors against them to frustrate their plan, all the days of Cyrus, the king of Persia, and until the kingdom of Darius, the king of Persia. And in the reign of Achashverosh, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the dwellers of Judea and Jerusalem. And in the days of Artaxerxes, Mithredath Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote with peace, to Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, and the script of the epistle was written in Aramaic and explained in Aramaic.

Who was Achashverosh?

4. "Achaemenian Dynasty," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 10 Jan. 2020

Achaemenian Dynasty (559–330 BCE), ancient Iranian dynasty whose kings founded and ruled the Achaemenian Empire. Achaemenes (Persian Hakhamanish), the Achaemenians' eponymous ancestor, is presumed to have lived early in the 7th century BCE, but little is known of his life. From his son Teispes two lines of kings descended. The kings of the older line were Cyrus I, Cambyses I, Cyrus II (the Great), and Cambyses II. After the death of Cambyses II (522 BCE) the junior line came to the throne with Darius I. The dynasty became extinct with the death of Darius III, following his defeat (330 BCE) by Alexander the Great...

During the time of Darius I and Xerxes I, the empire extended as far west as Macedonia and Libya and as far east as the Hyphasis (Beās) River; it stretched to the Caucasus Mountains and the Aral Sea in the north and to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Desert in the south.

King	Reign (secular calendar)
Cyrus II	559-c. 529 BCE
Cambyses II	529-522 BCE
Darius I	522-486 BCE
Xerxes I	486-465 BCE
Artaxerxes I	465-424 BCE

5. "Xerxes I. The Name." *Encyclopedia Iranica, Iranicaonline.org, 2011-09-30*

Xerxes is the common Greek (*Xérxēs*) and Latin form (*Xerxes, Xerses*) of the Achaemenid throne-name which in Old Persian is spelled *x-š-y-a-r-š-a...* (thus first P. Tedesco in Herzfeld, pp. 97 f. and Hoffmann, p. 85, fn. 15).

“Khshāyarsha” [Hebrew: חשיארש] pronunciation (audio) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Khashayarsha.ogg>

6. Esther 10:1

וַיִּשֶׂם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ (אחשרש כתיב) | מִסְעֵל־הָאָרֶץ וְאִיֵּי הַיָּם.

And King Achashverosh [written: A-ChaShRaSh] imposed a tribute on the land and on the isles of the sea.

7. "Xerxes I," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 20 Feb. 2020*

Xerxes was crowned and succeeded his father in October–December 486 BC when he was about 36 years old...Almost immediately, Xerxes crushed revolts in Egypt and Babylon that had broken out the year before, and appointed his brother Achaemenes as satrap over Egypt.

Almost immediately, Xerxes crushed revolts in Egypt and Babylon that had broken out the year before, and appointed his brother Achaemenes as satrap over Egypt. In 484 BC, he outraged the Babylonians by violently confiscating and melting down the golden statue of Bel (Marduk, Merodach), the hands of which the rightful king of Babylon had to clasp each New Year's Day.

8. Esther 1:3-4

בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּתוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חַיִּל | פָּרַס וּמְלֵי הַפְּרָתִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת לַפְּנִי: בְּהִרְאֹתוֹ אֶת־עֶשֶׂר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת־יְקָר תַּפְאָרַת גְּדוּלְתּוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים שְׂמוֹנִים וּמָאתַיִם יוֹם.

In the third year of his reign, he made a banquet for all his princes and his servants, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces [who were] before him. When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the splendor of his excellent majesty, many days, yea one hundred and eighty days.

9. Joshua J. Mark, "Xerxes I," *Ancient History Encyclopedia, 14 March 2018*

With relative peace established in his empire, he again turned his attention to Greece and conquest. He spent four years amassing enough supplies and weaponry for the campaign and also conscripting as many men as he could from various regions to ensure his victory. Herodotus tells the story of Pythias the Lydian (a descendant of King Croesus) whose five sons were among those conscripted. Pythias hosted the king and his army lavishly at Sardis in the winter of 481-480 BCE and offered to give Xerxes a considerable sum of money for the campaign, but Xerxes refused his offer and, instead, rewarded Pythias for his generosity by adding greatly to his treasury.

10. Esther 2:1

אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּשֶׁף חַמַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ זָכַר אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂתָה וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ.

After these events, when King Achashverosh's fury subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what had been decreed upon her.

11. Esther 2:16

וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אֶל־בַּיִת מַלְכוּתוֹ בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ טֵבֵת בְּשָׁנַת־שִׁבְעָה לְמַלְכוּתוֹ.

So Esther was taken to King Achashverosh, to his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month of Tevet, in the seventh year of his reign.

12. Esther 2:17

וַיֵּאָהֱבֵהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל־הַנְּשִׂימִים וַתִּשְׂאֵתֵן וַתִּחַסַּד לְפָנָיו מִכָּל־הַבָּתּוּלוֹת וַיִּשֶׂם בְּתֵר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֵאשִׁיהָ וַיַּמְלִיכָהּ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי.

And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor before him more than all the maidens, and he placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

13. Mitchell First, “Identifying Achashverosh and Esther in Secular Sources,” NJ Jewish Link, March 17, 2016

But what does Herodotus tell us about the wife of Xerxes? He only mentions one wife, “Amestris.” Close examination of the name “Amestris” supports its identification with Esther. The “is” at the end was just a suffix added to turn the foreign name into proper Greek grammatical form (just as “es” was added at the end of “Xerxes”). When comparing the remaining consonants, the name of the wife of Xerxes is recorded by the Greek historians as based around the consonants M, S, T and R, and the name as recorded in the Megilla is based around the consonants S, T and R. Out of the numerous possible consonants in these languages, three consonants are the same and in the same order! Probability suggests that this is not coincidence and that the two are the same person. (Most likely, her Persian name was composed of the consonants M, S, T and R, and the M was not preserved in the Hebrew.)...

Herodotus tells one story depicting the cruelty of Amestris. Ctesias portrays her negatively as well. But scholars today know not to believe the tales told by the Greek historians about their enemies, the Persians. Herodotus, known as the “Father of History,” is also known as the “Father of Lies.” The reputation of Ctesias as a historian is far worse; he is widely viewed as freely mixing fact and fiction.

Who was Mordechai?

14. Esther 2:6-7

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבֵּיטְרָה וּשְׁמוֹ מֶרְדֳּכָי בֶן יָאִיר בֶּן־שִׁמְעִי בֶן־קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי: אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִם־הַגְּלוּיָהּ אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָהּ עִם יְכַנְיָהּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל.

There was a Judean man in Shushan the capital, whose name was Mordechai the son of Jair the son of Shimei the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been exiled from Jerusalem with the exile that was exiled with Jeconiah, king of Judah, which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had exiled.

15. Rabbi David Nativ, “The Historical Framework of Megillat Esther,” <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/historical-framework-megillat-esther>

Towards the beginning of the Megilla, we encounter a well-known verse that makes reference to the exile of King Yehoyachin at the hands of the Bablylonians: "There lived a Jew... who had been exiled from Jerusalem in the group that was carried into exile along with Yechonya [an alternate name for Yehoyachin], the king of Judah" (2:5-6). This is the earliest date mentioned throughout the Megilla. It seems that the one exiled along with Yehoyachin was not Mordechai himself, but rather his great-grandfather, Kish: "There lived a Jew... by the name of Mordechai, son of Yair, son of Shimi, son of Kish the Benjaminite, who had been exiled..."

This exile of Yehoyachin occurred eleven years prior to the destruction of the first Temple, whereupon Benei Yisrael were driven to Babylonia. With the declaration of the Persian king Koresh (Cyrus) allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile could have effectively ended. As we know, however, only a minority of the nation - and not necessarily those of the upper classes - heeded the call to return. The number of returnees was small, and, correspondingly, so was the level of activity in Eretz Yisrael upon their arrival. For good reason, the halakha requires that cities fortified specifically from the time of Yehoshua (the original conquest of Eretz Yisrael) read the Megilla on the fifteenth, and not those fortified since the early Second Temple era, when the story of Esther actually took place. The situation of the Land of Israel at that time was woeful. As we know from Ezra and Nechemia, even the wall fortifying the city of Jerusalem hardly served as a sturdy fortress.

1. Midrash, Pesikta Zutrita to Esther 10:3

מלמד שאין אדם יכול להוציא ידי חובתו לכל העם. שהרי לא נמצא טוב לישראל כמרדכי, וכתוב בו ורצוי לרוב אחיו ולא לכל אחיו...
This teaches that one cannot satisfy everyone. No one was as good for Israel as Mordechai, and yet it says of him that he was 'beloved for *rov* of his brothers', and not for all of them.

The Mystery of the Tax

2. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra to Esther 10:1

והזכיר זה הכתוב להודיע כי הצליח בכל דרכיו ונראתה גבורתו אחר היות מרדכי לו למשנה:
The text mentioned this to teach that he succeeded in all of his ways, and his might was visible, because Mordechai was his viceroy.

3. Maharal, Or Chadash on Esther 10:1

בשביל המעשה הגדול שעשה בהמן היה לאחשורוש אימת המלכות עד שהיו שומעים לו הכל אף על גב שהיה מטיל עליהם מס...
Because of the great deed he performed upon Haman, Achashverosh's throne was feared, so that everyone listened to him even though he placed taxes upon them...

4. Maharal, Ner Mitzvah 1, עניני ארבע המלכיות

ואמרו בפרק עשרה יוחסין (קידושין עב א) "וארו חיוה אחרי תנינה דמיה לדב" (דניאל ז, ה). תני רב יוסף אלו פרסיים, שאוכלין ושותין כדוב, ומסורבלין כדוב, ומגדלין שער כדוב, ואין להם מנוחה כדוב. פירוש, שהם מבקשים תמיד לבלוע, כך הוא מדתם. ולכך כתיב אצל מלכות זה במגלת אסתר (אסתר י, א) "וישם המלך אחשורוש מס על הארץ ואיי הים". ומה בא הכתוב הזה לומר, מה שאמר ששם המלך מס על הארץ. רק שבא לומר, שכל זה כח אחשורוש, שהיה חסר, ומבקש תמיד למלאות נפשו מן העושר...

And the Talmud (Kiddushin 72a) said, "'And a second beast, like a bear. (Daniel 7:5)' Rav Yosef taught: These are the Persians, who eat and drink like a bear, who are fleshy like a bear, who are hairy like a bear, and who are restless like a bear." Meaning: They perpetually seek to swallow up; this is their trait. Thus it is written regarding this empire in Esther 10:1, "And King Achashverosh placed a tax on the land and the islands of the sea." What does this come to teach, saying that the king placed a tax on the land? Only, it comes to say that this was the strength of Achashverosh, that he was lacking, and he perpetually sought to fill his desire with wealth...

Achashverosh's Hunger

5. The Goldwater Rule, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goldwater_rule

The Goldwater rule is the informal name given to section 7 in the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Principles of Medical Ethics, which states that it is unethical for psychiatrists to give a professional opinion about public figures whom they have not examined in person, and from whom they have not obtained consent to discuss their mental health in public statements. It is named after former US Senator and 1964 presidential candidate Barry Goldwater...

6. Respect

1:2-3 – Party	1:13-15, 19 – Vashti	2:10,17 – The anonymous princess
3:8 – Haman's ploy	3:11 – Keep the change	8:3 – I won't back down

7. Talmud, Megilah 12b

ויקצף המלך מאד אמאי דלקה ביה כולי האי אמר רבא שלחה ליה בר אהוריריה דאבא אבא לקבל אלפא חמרא שתי ולא רוי וההוא גברא אשתטי בחמריה מיד וחמתו בערה בו

"And the king was enraged" – Why did her refusal so incite him? Rava explained: She sent a message to him, "Stable-boy of my father! My father drank the equivalent of 1,000 others (per Daniel 5:1) and did not become intoxicated, but you have become foolish with your wine." Immediately, "And his anger burned in him."

8. Talmud, Megilah 13a

"ותהי אסתר נשאת חן" אמר רבי אלעזר מלמד שלכל אחד ואחד נדמתה לו כאומתו.
"And Esther bore favour [in the eyes of all who saw her]" – Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that she appeared to each one as though she was from his nation.

9. Talmud, Megilah 13b

ודתיהם שנות מכל עם דלא אכלי מינן ולא נסבי מינן ולא מנסבי לן ואת דתי המלך אינם עשים דמפקי לכולא שתא בשה"י פה"י ולמלך אין שוה להניחם דאכלו ושתו ומבזו ליה למלכות ואפילו נופל זבוב בכוסו של אחד מהן זורקו ושותהו ואם אדוני המלך נוגע בכוסו של אחד מהן חובטו בקרקע ואינו שותהו

"And their law is different from that of any other nation" – They do not eat of ours, they do not marry of ours, and they do not marry theirs to us.

"And they do not practice the king's laws" – They spend the entire year in 'Today is Shabbat' 'Today is Pesach'.

"And it is not worthwhile for the king to let them be" – For they eat and drink and mock the throne. And even if a fly would fall into the cup of one of them, he would throw out [the fly] and drink it, but if my master the king would touch the cup of one of them, he would throw it on the ground and he would not drink it.

10. Maharal, Ner Mitzvah 1, עניני ארבע המלכיות

ולפיכך אמר להמן (אסתר ג, יא) "הכסף נתון לך", ולא שאין אני רוצה הכסף שלך, רק מקבל אני ממך, וחוזר אני ונותן לך. ולא החזיק בכסף, שזה ודאי היה לו גנאי גדול לקבל כסף, ולתת עם אחד להריגה בשביל כסף. רק בשביל אהבת כסף, היה מקבלו וחוזר ונתן הכסף אליו.

Because Achashverosh perpetually sought to swallow up, he said to Haman, "The money is given to you." Not that I don't want your money; rather, I accept it from you, and then I give it back to you. He did not hold on to the money, as it would have been disgraceful for him to accept money and to give a nation for execution for the sake of money. Only, for love of money, he received it, and then he gave the money back.

11. Security

3:1 – Haman the Nobody

4:11 – None shall pass

5:3 – A voting majority?

5:4, 5:8 – Be my guest!

6:1 – Insomnia

7:8 – Bad move, Haman

12. Talmud, Megilah 16a

תנא המן ספר של כפר קרצום היה עשרים ושנים שנה

We have learned: Haman was the barber of Kfar Kartzom for 22 years.

13. Talmud, Megilah 15b

נפלה ליה מילתא בדעתיה אמר מאי דקמן דזמינתיה אסתר להמן דלמא עצה קא שקלי עילויה דההוא גברא למקטליה דהדר אמר אי הכי לא הוה גברא דרחים לי דהוה מודע לי

A thought fell into his mind. He said, "What is this, that Esther invited Haman? Perhaps they are taking counsel against 'that man', to kill him!" Then he said, "If so, isn't there anyone who likes me, who will tell me?" Then he said, "Perhaps there is someone who benefited me and I did not pay him back, and so people refrain from revealing this to me?"

14. Talmud, Megilah 16a

אתא לביתיה והמן נפל על המטה נפל נפל מיבעי ליה אמר רבי אלעזר מלמד שבא מלאך והפילו עליה

He entered his palace, "And Haman was falling on the bed on which Esther was seated." "Falling"? Shouldn't it say "fell"? Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that a *malach* came and knocked him down on to the bed.

15. Talmud, Megilah 12a

ובמלאות הימים האלה וגו' רב ושמואל חד אמר מלך פיקח היה וחד אמר מלך טיפש היה מאן דאמר מלך פיקח היה שפיר עבד דקריב רחיקא ברישא דבני מאתיה כל אימת דבעי מפייס להו ומאן דאמר טפש היה דאיבעי ליה לקרובי בני מאתיה ברישא דאי מרדו ביה הנך הני הוו קיימי בהדיה

"And at the conclusion of these days, etc." Rav and Shemuel debated: One said he was a wise king, the other said he was a foolish king. The one who said he was a wise king said he did well, drawing near the distant first, for he could always appease the residents of his city. The one who said he was foolish said he should have drawn the residents of his city near first, for if the others would rebel, these would stand with him.

16. Dr. Schlomo Reimer, The Emotional Foundations of the Human Personality (1998), pg. 60

The absence of emotional security always tends to spawn hate. The combination of emotional insecurity and hate invariably gives rise to a personality trait in which aggression is practised for the express purpose of bolstering security.

Night Reading: Main Reading or Custom?

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1. Responsa Yabia Omer Volume 1, Orach Chaim #43

ירושלים. אדר תש"ז לפ"ק. נשאלתי בהיות שממשלת המנדט של בריטניה, הטילה עלינו פעה"ק ירושלים ת"ו עוצר חמור מערב עד בוקר, והמפר את העוצר ירה יירה. (ונתקיים בהם עושה עוצר ולא במשפט בחצי ימיו יעזבנו וכו'). אם אפשר לקרוא את המגילה בציבור, מבעוד יום אחר פלג המנחה, או אין לקראה אלא בלילה אע"פ שהוא ביחידות.

Jerusalem, Adar 5707 (1947). I was asked that being that the British Mandate has imposed upon us, here in the holy city of Jerusalem, a strict curfew from evening to morning, and one who violates the curfew will be shot... if it is possible to read the megillah with a minyan, during the day after Plag Hamincha, or should one read it only at night, even though they will be reading it alone?

2. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 4a (modified Davidson Edition translation)

ואריב"ל חייב אדם לקרות את המגילה בלילה ולשנותה ביום שנאמר (תהלים כב, ג) א-ל-ה-י אקרא יומם ולא תענה ולילה ולא דומיה לי סבור מינה למקרייה בליליא ולמיתנא מתניתין דידה ביממא אמר להו רבי ירמיה לדידי מיפרשא לי מיניה דרבי חייה בר אבא כגון דאמרי אינשי אעבור פרשתא דא ואתנייה איתמר נמי אמר רבי חלבו אמר עולא ביראה חייב אדם לקרות את המגילה בלילה ולשנותה ביום שנאמר (תהלים ל, יג) למען יזמרך כבוד ולא ידום ה' א-ל-ה-י לעולם אודך:

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A person is obligated to read the Megilla at night and then to repeat it [lishnota] during the day, as it is stated: "O my G-d, I call by day but You do not answer; and at night, and there is no surcease for me" (Psalms 22:3). Some understood from it that one should read the Megilla at night and study its relevant tractate of Mishna by day. Rabbi Yirmeya said to them: It was explained to me personally by Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba himself [that the term lishnota here has a different connotation], for example, as people say: I will conclude this section and repeat it. Rabbi Helbo said that Ulla Bira'a said: A person is obligated to read the Megilla at night and then repeat it during the day, as it is stated: "So that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent; O Lord, my G-d, I will give thanks to You forever" (Psalms 30:13).

3. Mishnah Megillah 2:4-6 (Mishnah Yomit translation)

אין קורין את המגילה... עד שתגז הסמה. וכלן שעשו משעלה עמוד השחר, פשר: כל היום פשר לקריאת המגילה... כל הלילה פשר לקצירת העמר ולהקטר חלבים ואפרים. זה הכלל, דבר שמצותו ביום, פשר כל היום. דבר שמצותו בלילה, פשר כל הלילה:

They do not read the Megillah... until the sun has risen. But if any of these things is done after dawn, it is valid. The whole day is a valid time for reading the Megillah... The whole night is valid for reaping the Omer and for burning fat and limbs [on the altar]. This is the general principle: any matter whose commandment is during the day, is valid all day and any matter whose commandment is at night is valid all night.

4. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 20a (Davidson Edition translation)

גמ' מגלן דאמר קרא (אסתר ט, כח) והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים ביום אין בלילה לא לימא תיהוי תיובתא דר' יהושע בן לוי דאמר ריב"ל חייב אדם לקרות את המגילה בלילה ולשנותה ביום כי קתני אדיום:

The Gemara asks: From where do we derive the halakha taught in the mishna that the Megilla may be read only during the day? The Gemara answers: As the verse states: "And that these days should be remembered and kept" (Esther 9:28). The word "days" indicates during the day, yes, but at night, no. The Gemara asks: Let us say that this is a conclusive refutation of the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A person is obligated to read the Megilla at night and then repeat it during the day. [There is no proof from here], as the mishna was referring to the daytime reading.

5. Tosefta, Megillah 2:4

קראה בלילה לא יצא ידי חובתו אמ' ר' יוסי מעשה בר' יוחנן בן נורי שקראה בצפורי בלילה אמ' לו אין שעת סכנה ראייה. If one read it at night, they have not fulfilled their obligation. Rabbi Yosei said: There was a story with Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri who read it in Tzipori at night. [The Rabbis] said to him: A time of danger cannot be used as a proof.

6. Ritva, Megillah 4a

...כתב רבינו יעקב ז"ל אפילו הכי כשחוזר וקורא ביום מברך שהחיינו, שאין קריאה של יום טפלה משל לילה דאדרבה עיקר קריאה ביום היא וימים (משמע) [כתיב] בפרשה ומשמע יום דוקא כדאמרינן גבי סעודה (לק' ז' ב'), ותנא נמי פסיק ותני לה לקמן במכילתין (כ' ב') בדברים שביום כשר כל היום לקריאת מגילה, ולא קתני ליה בהדי דברים שבליילה ונראין דבריו וכן נהגו. ומסתבר לי דבקריאת לילה ליכא קפידיא בעשרה ואפילו שלא בזמנה דכולי עלמא, דהרי כפרים המקדימין ליום הכניסה בלילה במקומן היו קורין אותה דהא לא מפטרי מקריאה זו דחובה היא ובמקומן לא היה להם עשרה, ואף בלילה לא מכנפי להאי...

Rabbi Yaakov [Tam] wrote, that even so, when he rereads the megillah during the day, he recites “shehecheyanu”, as the day reading is not lesser than the night reading, as the opposite is true – the main reading is during the day, and it says “days” in the [megillah], which implies that specifically the day [is the main reading], just as we say about the meal (Megillah 7b), and the Tanna also taught it plainly later on in our Masechet (Megillah 20b), in listing the things that are valid during the day, [that] the entire day is valid for megillah reading, and it did not list it among the things that are valid during the night, and so is their custom [to repeat the “shehecheyanu”]. It seems to me that for the night reading there is no requirement to have a minyan, even not in its correct time according to all opinions, as the villages that read early on the day of entering would read the megillah at night in their places, as they are not exempt from this reading, which is a requirement, and in their places, they did not have ten [people], or even [if they did], at night they [would] not gather them...

7. Turei Even, Megillah 4a

ונ"ל דהאי קריאה דלילה אינו אלא מדרבנן ואינו עיקר חיוב של רוח הקודש והרי קרא כתיב והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים איתקש זכירה לעשי' מה עשייה למפרע לא אף זכירה למפרע לא ומש"ה אמרינן לקמן רפ"ב (דף י"ז) דמה"ט הקורא את המגילה למפרע לא יצא... ה"נ איתקש זכירה לעשי' מה עשי' בלילה לא כדאמרינן לקמן (דף ז') סעודת פורים שאכלה בלילה לא יצא י"ח מ"ט ימי משתה ושמחה כתיב אף זכירה אינו בלילה והני קראי דמייתי להו בשמעתינן לקריאת המגילה בלילה אינו אלא אסמכתא בעלמא. ואע"ג דהוי ס"ד למיקרי בלילה ולמייתי מתניתין דידה ביממא מ"מ לא קיימא הכי.

It seems to me that this night reading is only Rabbinic, and it is not part of the main obligation [to read megillah inspired by] Ruach Hakodesh, as the verse writes “and these days are mentioned and performed” – the mentioning and performance are compared to each other – just as performance cannot be done out of order, so too, the mentioning cannot be done out of order, and therefore we say in the beginning of the second chapter (Megillah 17) that for this reason, one who reads the megillah out of order has not fulfilled their obligation... So too, let us compare the mentioning and the performance, that just as the performance cannot be done at night, as we say later (Megillah 7), that if one ate their Purim meal at night, they have not fulfilled their obligation, since it says “days of feasting and rejoicing”, so too, mentioning is not at night, and these verses that were brought in our discussion for reading the megillah at night are only an asmachta. Even though we thought that one would only read it at night, and learn its Mishnayot during the day, nevertheless, we do not conclude that way.

8. Masechet Soferim 21:8

מקום שנהגו לקרות את המגילה שני ימים קורין לילה ויום קורין הכל כמנהג המדינה...

In places that they had the custom to read the megillah on both days, they should read it, [and where they have the custom to read it] day and night, they should read it, all according to the local custom...

9. Alei Tamar, Megillah 2:4

ברם קשה שא"כ איך מברכין על קריאתה בלילה, הרי אין מברכין על מנהג כמ"ש בסוכה מ"ד, אולם לפמ"ש התוס' שם אין ראייה מזה עיי"ש. ועוד הרי במסכת סופרים פי"ד הי"ה אמר רבי לוי מגילת אסתר צריך לקרותה בלילה ולשנותה ביום ורק הקריאה בשתי מוצאי שבתות דלפני פורים תלוי במנהג עיי"ש.

However, it is troublesome, since how can we recite a blessing over the night reading? We do not recite a blessing over a custom, as per Sukkah 44, however, according to what the Tosfot wrote there, there is no proof from this, see there. Furthermore, behold in Masechet Sofrim 14:18 Rabbi Levi said that Megillat Esther must be read at night and only the reading of the two Motza'ei Shabbatot before Purim was dependent on custom, see there.

10. Kissei Rachamim to Soferim 21:8

...ואם כן נראה להגיה ולהשמיט תיבת קורין השנית והמנהג לא קאי אלא על קריאת ב' ימים או יום אחד...

...And if so, it is fitting to edit this and to remove the word “they should read it” the second time it appears, and [then] the custom only refers to reading it for two days or one day.

11. Yerushalmi, Megillah 2:4 (R' Hoffman translation)

עולה בירייה ר' לעזר בשם ר' חנינה רגיל צריך לקרותה בלילה ולשנותה ביום הוינן סברין מימר לשנות משנתה אמר רבי אבא מרי בבלייה לשנות קרייתה.

‘Ula Biriya, Rabbi Lazar in the name of Rabbi Chanina: “A person who regularly (רגיל) reads the Megillah must (צריך) do so at night and again during the day.”

12. Korban Ha'edah, Megillah 2:4

ר"ח רגיל. כך שמו ל"א מי שהוא רגיל ובקי בקריאה וכו"נ עיקר: צריך לקרותה בלילה. אבל שאינו בקי אינו צריך דעיקר קריאתה ביום: Ra"ch Ragil. So was his name, another possibility [is that the word “ragil” refers to] one who is a regular and proficient reader, and so seems [correct]. Needs to read it at night. But one who is not proficient does not need to, as the main reading is in the daytime.

13. Responsa Har Tzvi, Orach Chaim 2:120 (R' Hoffman translation)

אבל דבר זה קשה לאומרו דמימי מרדכי ואסתר בשושן הבירה וכל ימי בית שני עד אחרי עבור תקופת התנאים משך זמן של שש מאות שנה ויותר לא היה קריאת המגילה בלילה, וכי אפשר הדבר שבזמן שהיתה ירושלים בבנינה וישראל במעמד לא מצאו טעם לתקן תקנה זו ורק אחרי זמן רב מהחורבן ורוב ישראל יצאו בגולה אז ראו להוסיף ולקרות המגילה...

It is difficult to say that in the days of Mordecai and Esther, and throughout the Second Temple and Tannaitic periods, extending over 600 years, the Megillah was not read at night. Is it possible that during the glory years of Jerusalem no authority found it wise to legislate this ordinance, but that in the post-Destruction era the sages felt it necessary to do so?

14. Rabbi Ari Zivotofsky, What's the Truth About . . . Reading the Megillah on Purim Morning?

Rav Soloveitchik (Hararei Kedem, Vol. 1, p. 334-335), based on the Netziv (introduction to Ha'emek Davar, ot bet), offers a fascinating explanation for the two Megillah readings. He explains that the “real” holiday of Purim doesn't start until the daytime. Hence, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's directive is not that one must read the Megillah during the night and in the day; rather, one must “read the Megillah and then repeat it.” The night reading is merely “preparation” for the daytime reading. Chazal instituted that the Megillah be read at night so that during the daytime reading people will pay more attention because they have already had the preparatory reading the night before.

15. Rabbi Evan Hoffman, Reading the Megillah at Night: A Secondary Development

Over the span of a millennium, Purim was extended to include the preceding evening by a combination of factors: rabbinic legislation, popular will, and the decisions of the halakhic codifiers. Ironically, for many American Jews, the night rituals of Purim are their primary means of observing the holiday. Attendance in the synagogue is much greater for the evening Megillah reading than it is for the morning rendition. The embellishment and extension of Purim should come as no surprise. The Jewish masses, often terrorized by our enemies, like the idea of celebrating victory over our would-be murderers, and doing so in carnivalesque fashion. The Talmud considers the Megillah reading to be a rare example of a “beloved mitzvah” כיון דהביבה (Megillah 21b). A holiday that was initially scorned by various Jewish factions became an important annual observance because it successfully mixes entertainment and Jewish pride.