

Julia Haart's Redeeming Quality- #Unorthodox or Tanakh Tradition?

Source Sheet by Olivia Friedman

1. BEYOND THE CATEGORIES

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Today we will learn about people's complexity. It's easy to categorize people- deciding they are a hero or a villain, a cartoonish caricature of a human being. But our Jewish texts show us this is not the case. Even those we see as villains- whether in Tanakh or Midrash- often have a redeeming quality. Why? And what can we learn from this?

2. Excerpt from 'My Unorthodox Life,' Season 2, Episode 9- "Put a Ring On It"

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Julia: I wanna plan for the future and justice being served. I wanna start thinking about what to do with that when I get it. So I'm meeting with Amber, and my idea is to buy a building, to make most of that building free apartments. **Where women can come with their families when they escape abusive men or worlds in which they have no rights.** They have a place to go. [...] And the vision for this space is that it would house individuals who... What? I would love to open it to anyone who's leaving, you know, somewhere where it's very fundamentalist, and they don't have rights, or they were married off as children and teenagers. I think one of the things that we've seen in our work is a lot of the people, even if they leave, or they want something more, they want that community feeling. They need, they miss, you know, the Shabbos, the yontif, the singing, the community. So we need to create a different community here where they feel supported and part of something and that they're not alone. Because I don't think people realize that feeling of true aloneness. When you walk into a world where nobody knows you, no one's ever heard of you. You have no connectivity. It's really frightening. It's a terrible feeling. And to me, the idea is...

You remember the show Maid on Netflix? It was a great show, but it also was very educational in the sense that it made me realize that the four problems people have... women have when they're getting out of a situation like this is, number one, childcare, number two, transportation, number three, housing, and number four, educational services. On the bottom two floors, I want there to be childcare in the building, so you don't have to worry about where your child is gonna be, how you're gonna get your kid to daycare, and about transportation. And then next door, I wanna buy another building that will house the teachers, the psychiatrists, the

psychologists, the doctors, the professors, whoever we need to train them and teach them in the ways of this world, in having a profession, and understanding how to live and survive in a world that's so far removed from the world we live in. **It's a safe place... it's a safe harbor facility. That's what I would call it. It's a place where people can go. They don't have to pay rent. They don't have to pay for childcare. They don't have to pay for education. We'll start the foundation, and cover as much of that ourselves as we can, and we'll involve people to cover more. I really wanna help women get out of situations where they're suffering, and I want them to be educated.**

(Transcript from TVShowTranscripts.OurBoard.org)

3. ESAU ג.

4. **Rashi on Genesis 25:25:1** ד.
 אדמוני RED — a sign that he [Esau] would **always be shedding blood** (Genesis Rabbah 63:8).
 רש"י על בראשית כ"ה:כ"ה:א'
 אדמוני. סימן הוא שיהא שופך דמים
 (בראשית רבה):

5. **Rashi on Genesis 25:27:1** ה.
 AND THEY GREW ... ויהי עשו AND ESAU WAS — So long as they were young they could not be distinguished by what they did and no one paid much attention to their characters, but when they reached the age of thirteen, one went his way to the houses of learning **and the other went his way to the idolatrous temples** (Genesis Rabbah 63:10).
 רש"י על בראשית כ"ה:כ"ז:א'
 ויגדלו ... ויהי עשו. כל זמן שהיו קטנים, לא היו נפרים במעשיהם, ואין אדם מדקדק בהם מה טיבם; כיון שנעשו בני שלש עשרה שנה, זה פירש לבתי מדרשות וזה פירש לע"ז:

6. **Rashi on Genesis 25:34:1** ו.
 THUS ESAU DESPISED— Scripture testifies to his wickedness: **that he despised the Service of the Omnipresent!**
 רש"י על בראשית כ"ה:ל"ד:א'
 ויבו עשו. העיד הכתוב על רשעו שבוזה עבודתו של מקום:

7. **Bereishit Rabbah 65:1**

And when Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon etc. It is written "The swine out of the wood doth ravage it, that which moves in the field feeds on it" (Psalms 80:14). R' Pinchas and R' Helkiah in R' Simon's name said: Of all the prophets, only two, Moses and Asaph, exposed it. Asaph: The boar out of the wood doth ravage it. While Moses said: And the swine, because he parts his hoof. Why does he compare it [the Roman state] to a swine? For this reason: when the swine is lying down it puts out its hoofs, as if it to say '[I have split hooves, therefore I am] tahor, pure; so does the wicked State rob and oppress, yet pretend to be executing justice. **So for forty years Esau used to ensnare married women and rape them, yet when he attained forty years he compared himself to his father**, saying, "As my father was forty years old when he married, so I will marry at the age of forty." Hence it is written, 'And when Esau was forty years old, he took to wife, etc.'

8. **Genesis 27:15**

(15) **Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house**, and had her younger son Jacob put them on;

.ג. **בראשית רבה ס"ה:א'**

וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה (בראשית כו, לד), הָדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב (תהלים פ, יד):
 יְכַרְסֵּמְנָה חֲזִיר מִיַּעַר, רַבִּי פִּינְחָס בְּשֵׁם
 רַבִּי סִימֹן, מִכָּל הַנְּבִיאִים לֹא פָרְסְמוּהָ
 אֶלָּא שְׁנַיִם, מֹשֶׁה וְאַסָּף. מֹשֶׁה אָמַר
 (דברים יד, ח): וְאֵת הַחֲזִיר כִּי מִפְּרִיס
 פָּרְסָה הוּא. אַסָּף אָמַר, יְכַרְסֵּמְנָה חֲזִיר
 מִיַּעַר. לָמָּה הוּא מוֹשְׁלָה בַחֲזִיר, אֶלָּא
 מָה חֲזִיר הִנֵּה בְשָׁעָה שֶׁהוּא רוֹבֵץ הוּא
 מִפְּשֵׁט אֵת טְלָפוֹ כְּלוֹמַר שְׁאֵנִי טָהוֹר,
 כִּי מִלְכוּת הַזֹּאת הִרְשָׁעָה גּוֹזְלָת
 וְחוֹמְסָת נִרְאָת כְּאֵלוֹ מַצַּעַת אֵת הַבֵּימָה.
 כִּי עֵשָׂו כָּל אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה צָד נָשִׁי
 אֲנָשִׁים וּמַעֲנָה אוֹתָם, וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ
 לְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה דָּמָה עֲצָמוֹ לְאָבִיו,
 אָמַר מָה אָבָא נָשָׂא אִשָּׁה בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים
 שָׁנָה אִף אֲנִי נוֹשֵׂא אִשָּׁה בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים
 שָׁנָה, הָדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב: וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו בֶּן
 אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה.

.ה. **בראשית כ"ז:ט"ו**

(טו) וַתִּקַּח רַבֵּקָה אֶת־בְּגָדֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנֵה
 הַגָּדֹל הַחֲמֹדֶת אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה בְּבֵית
 וַתִּלְבַּשׁ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה הַקָּטָן:

9. **Bereishit Rabbah 65:16**

Rav Shimon Ben Gamliel said: All my lifetime I tended to my father, yet I did not do for him a hundredth part of the service Eisav did for his father. I used to wait upon my father in soiled garments and go out into the streets in clean ones, **but when Eisav waited on his father he did so in royal robes. "For nothing but royal robes befits my father's honor."**

ט. **בראשית רבה ס"ה:ט"ז**

(בראשית כז, טו): אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה בְּבֵית, שָׁבֵהוּ הָיָה מְשַׁמֵּשׂ אֶת אָבִיו. אָמַר רַבֵּן שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל כָּל יְמֵי הָיִיתִי מְשַׁמֵּשׂ אֶת אָבִי וְלֹא שְׁמַשְׁתִּי אוֹתוֹ אֶחָד מִמָּאָה שְׁשַׁמֵּשׂ יַעֲקֹב אֶת אָבִיו, אֲנִי בְּשֵׁעָה שְׁהֵייתִי מְשַׁמֵּשׂ אֶת אָבִי הָיִיתִי מְשַׁמֵּשׂוֹ בְּבִגְדִים מְלֻכָּיִם, וּבְשֵׁעָה שְׁהֵייתִי יוֹצֵא לְדֶרֶךְ הָיִיתִי יוֹצֵא בְּבִגְדִים נְקִיִּים, אָבִל יַעֲקֹב בְּשֵׁעָה שְׁהָיָה מְשַׁמֵּשׂ אֶת אָבִיו לֹא הָיָה מְשַׁמֵּשׂוֹ אֶלָּא בְּבִגְדֵי מְלָכוֹת, אָמַר אֵין כְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל אָבִי לְהֵיוֹת מְשַׁמֵּשׂוֹ אֶלָּא בְּבִגְדֵי מְלָכוֹת,

10. **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. How do our Sages understand or describe Esau's character and behavior?
2. In what area did Esau excel?
3. How important do you think this redeeming quality was?

11. Excerpt from Nitzozos.com Dvar Torah 'Toldos: Honor Your Parents- Even Eisav Did'

In Devarim (2:2-5), Hashem tells Klal Yisrael to bypass the nation of Edom. *"You shall not provoke them, for I will not give you of their land...because I have given Mount Seir to Eisav as an inheritance."* **The Medrash in Devarim Rabbah (1:17) says that Eisav (later in the form of Rome) was being rewarded for honoring his parents.** Rabbi Yehudah bar Sima said: Hashem saw Eisav destroying His Temple and remained silent... because Eisav still deserves reward for honoring his parents... The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I am paying Eisav his dues."

Eisav was a murderer and yet in the merit of his Kibbud Av V'Eim he is accorded tremendous honor.

12. **EGLON**

13. **Judges 3:13-15**

(13) [Eglon] brought the Ammonites and the Amalekites together under his command, and went and defeated Israel and occupied the City of Palms. (14) **The Israelites were subject to King Eglon of Moab for eighteen years.** (15) **Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD,** and the LORD raised up a champion for them: the Benjaminite Ehud son of Gera, a left-handed man. It happened that the Israelites sent tribute to King Eglon of Moab through him.

.ג' שופטים ג'י"ג-ט"ו

(ג) וַיֹּאסֶף אֵלָיו אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וְעַמְלֵק וַיִּלְךְ וַיִּדֹף אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת־עִיר הַתְּמָרִים: (ד) וַיַּעֲבְדוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־עֲגְלוֹן מֶלֶךְ־מּוֹאָב שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂר שָׁנָה: (ט) וַיִּזְעֲקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־ה' וַיִּקָּם ה' לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת־אֶהוּד בֶּן־גֵּרָא בֶן־הַיְמִינִי אִישׁ אֵטָר יְדֵי־יְמִינוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַחֵהוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָדוֹ מִנְחָה לְעֲגְלוֹן מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב:

14. **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Based on the above verse, did *Bnei Yisrael* consider King Eglon's reign benevolent or oppressive?
2. How do you know?

Ehud is the *Shofet*, or tribal leader, appointed to save the Israelites from Eglon. He does this through created a double-edged sword that he wears on his right side (because he uses his left hand to draw it).

15. **Judges 3:19-20**

(19) But he himself [Ehud] returned from Pesilim, near Gilgal, and said, "Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you." [Eglon] thereupon commanded, "Silence!" So all those in attendance left his presence; (20) and when Ehud approached him, he was sitting alone in his cool upper chamber. **Ehud said, "I have a message for you from God"; whereupon he [Eglon] rose from his seat.**

.טו' שופטים ג'י"ט-כ'

(יט) וְהוּא שָׁב מִן־הַפְּסִילִים אֲשֶׁר אֶת־הַגִּלְגָּל וַיֹּאמֶר דְּבַר־סֵתֶר לִי אֱלֹהִי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הֵם וַיִּצְאוּ מֵעָלָיו כָּל־הָעֹמְדִים עָלָיו: (כ) וְאֶהוּד | בָּא אֵלָיו וְהוּא יָשָׁב בְּעֵלִית הַמְּקַרְהָ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ לְבַדּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶהוּד דְּבַר־אֱלֹקִים לִי אֱלֹהִי וַיִּקָּם מֵעַל הַכִּסֵּא:

16. **Ruth Rabbah 2:9** טז.
“They took for themselves Moavite wives: Rabbi Beivai said in the name of Rabbi Reuven: Ruth and Orpa were the daughters of Eglon, as it is stated: “I have a secret matter for you king. He said: Be silent...” (Judges 3:19), and it is written: “Ehud came to him...Ehud said: I have a matter of God to you, and he stood from his throne” (Judges 3:20). The Holy One blessed be He said to him: **‘You arose from your throne in deference to Me, by your life, I will establish a son from you who will sit on the throne of God.’**
- רות רבה ב'ט'
. רבי ביבי בשם רבי ראובן אמר, רות
וערפה בנותיו של עגלון היו, שנאמר
(שופטים ג, יט): דבר סתר לי אליך המלך
ויאמר הם וגו', וכתוב (שופטים ג, כ):
ואהוד בא אליו וגו' ויאמר אהוד דבר
אלקים לי אליך ויקם מעל הכסא, אמר
לו הקדוש ברוך הוא אתה עמדת
מכסאך לכבודי, תיך הריני מעמיד
ממך בן יושב על כסא ה'.
17. **Ruth 4:17** יז.
(17) and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, “A son is born to Naomi!”
They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.
- רות ד'יז'
(יז) ותקראנה לו השכנות שם לאמר
ילד-בן לנעמי ותקראנה שמו עובד
הוא אבי-ישי אבי דוד: {פ}
18. **GENERATION OF KING AHAB** יח.
19. Ahab and Jezebel were a wicked queen and king in the time of the Israelite monarchy featured in the Book of Kings. The prophet Elijah chooses to bring a drought upon the land and Ahab fruitlessly searches for Elijah everywhere and cannot find him. But how was it possible for Elijah to remain hidden? The Jerusalem Talmud elaborates... יט.

20. **Jerusalem Talmud Peah 1:1:46**
The generation of Ahab were idolaters but since there was no informing among them they went to war and were victorious. That is what Obadiah said to Elijah (*IK*. 18:13): “Certainly it was told to my lord what I did when Izebel slew all prophets of the Eternal etc., and I provided them with bread and water.” [If bread, why does he have to mention water, and if water, why does he have to mention bread. This teaches you that it was more difficult for him to provide them with water than with bread.] But Elijah was standing on Mount Carmel and declaring (*IK*.18:22): **“I remained alone as prophet for the Eternal,” and everybody knew and nobody informed the king**
21. AHAB
22. Ahab is an extremely complex character. He knowingly defies God and his prophet, and his actions culminate in turning a blind eye while his wife plots the murder of Navot and the seizure of Navot's property. But even Ahab has redeeming qualities- both in the Tanakh itself and in the Jerusalem Talmud.
23. **I Kings 16:30-33**
 (30) Ahab son of Omri **did what was displeasing to the LORD, more than all who preceded him.** (31) Not content to follow the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Phoenicians, and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. (32) He erected an altar to Baal in the temple of Baal which he built in Samaria. (33) Ahab also made a sacred post. Ahab **did more to vex the LORD, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel who preceded him.**
- כ. תלמוד ירושלמי פאה א'א'מ"ו
 אָבֵל דִּירוֹ שֶׁל אַחָאָב עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה הָיוּ וְעַל יְדֵי שְׁלֵא הָיָה לָהֶן דִּילְטוֹרִיאָה הָיוּ יוֹרְדִין לְמַלְחָמָה וְנוֹצְחִין הוּא שְׁעוֹבְדֵיהוּ אָמַר לְאַלְיָהוּ הֲלֵא הוּגַד לְאֲדוֹנֵי אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּהַרוֹג אֵיזוֹבֵל אֶת נְבִיאֵי יִי וְגוֹמֵר וְאֶכְלָפְלֵם לְחֵם וְמַיִם. אִם לְחֵם לְמָה מַיִם וְאִם מַיִם לְמָה לְחֵם. אֶלָּא מְלַמֵּד שֶׁהָיוּ הַמַּיִם קָשִׁין לוֹ לְהַבִּיאַ יוֹתֵר מִן הַלְחֵם. וְאַלְיָהוּ מְכַרְיֵי בְּרֵאשׁ הַכַּרְמֶל אָנִי נוֹתַרְתִּי נְבִיא לְבַדִּי לֵי. וְכָל־עַמָּא יִדְעוֹן וְלֹא מְפָרְסְמִין לְמַלְכָּא.
- כא. מלכים א ט"ז:ל-ל"ג
 (ל) וַיַּעַשׂ אַחָאָב בְּוַעֲמָרִי הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ה' מְפַל אֲשֶׁר לְפָנָיו: (לא) וַיְהִי הַנֶּקֶל לְכַתּוֹ בַּחֲטָאוֹת יִרְבְּעִים בְּוַנְבַּט וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה אֶת־אֵיזוֹבֵל בַּת־אֶתְבַּעֵל מֶלֶךְ צִידוֹנִים וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיַּעֲבֹד אֶת־הַבַּעַל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ: (לב) וַיִּקֶּם מִזְבֵּחַ לַבַּעַל בַּיִת הַבַּעַל אֲשֶׁר בְּנָה בְּשַׁמְרוֹן: (לג) וַיַּעַשׂ אַחָאָב אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה וַיִּוֹסֵף אַחָאָב לַעֲשׂוֹת לְהַכְעִיס אֶת־ה' אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְפַל מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְפָנָיו:

24. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER .כד.
1. How do these texts describe Ahab?
 2. Do you expect that a person described this way could have a redeeming quality?
25. **I Kings 21:25-29** .כה.
- (25) Indeed, there never was anyone like Ahab, who **committed himself to doing what was displeasing to the LORD**, at the instigation of his wife Jezebel. (26) He acted most abominably, straying after the fetishes just like the Amorites, whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.) (27) When Ahab heard these words, he rent his clothes and put sackcloth on his body. He fasted and lay in sackcloth and walked about subdued. (28) Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: (29) **“Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?** Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the disaster in his lifetime; I will bring the disaster upon his house in his son’s time.”
- מלכים א כ"א:כ"ה-כ"ט
- (כה) רק לא־הָיָה כְּאַחָאָב אֲשֶׁר הִתְמַכֵּר לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר־הִסְתָּה אֹתוֹ אִינוּבֵל אֲשֶׁתּוֹ: (כו) וַיִּתְעַב מְאֹד לְלַכֵּת אַחֲרֵי הַגְּלָלִים כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ הָאֲמֹלִי אֲשֶׁר הוֹרִישׁ ה' מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: {פ}
- (כז) וַיְהִי כִשְׂמֹעַ אַחָאָב אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּקְרַע בְּגָדָיו וַיִּשָּׂם־שָׂק עַל־בְּשָׂרוֹ וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּשָּׂק וַיְהִלֵּךְ אֵט: {פ}
- (כח) וַיְהִי דְבַר־ה' אֶל־אֵלִיָּהוּ הַתִּישְׁבִי לֵאמֹר: (כט) הֲרָאִיתָ כִּי־נִכְנַע אַחָאָב מִלְּפָנָי יָעַן כִּי־נִכְנַע מִפְּנֵי לֹא־אָבִי הָרַעַה בְּיָמָיו בְּיָמַי בָּנוּ אָבִיא הָרַעַה עַל־בֵּיתוֹ:
26. .כו.
1. What surprising actions does Ahab take?
 2. Is God moved by these actions?
 3. What does God determine will happen?

27. Sanhedrin 102b

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: For what virtue was Ahab privileged to ascend to the monarchy and rule for twenty-two years? It is due to the fact that he respected the Torah, which was given with twenty-two letters, as it is stated: “And he sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, into the city, and said to him: So says Ben-Hadad: Your silver and your gold are mine; your wives and also your good children, are mine. And the king of Israel answered and said: It is according to your saying, my lord, O king: I am yours, and all that I have. And the messengers came again, and said: So speaks Ben-Hadad, saying: I sent to you, saying: You shall deliver me your silver, and your gold, and your wives, and your children. Yet I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house, and the houses of your servants, and it shall be, that they shall put in their hand all the delight of your eyes and take it...And he said to the messengers of Ben-Hadad, tell my lord the king: All that you did send for to your servant at the first I will do; but this thing I may not do” (I Kings 20:2–6, 9). The Gemara asks: **What is “the delight of your eyes” that Ahab refused to give Ben-Hadad after agreeing to give him his wives and his gold? Is it not a Torah scroll? Ahab treated the Torah with deference.**

28. 1. What was Ahab willing to give to Ben-Hadad to avoid war?
 2. What was Ahab unwilling to give to Ben-Hadad?
 3. What is the reading in the Talmud regarding what that says about Ahab?
 4. What can we learn from this?

29. JEZEBEL

כז. סנהדרין ק"ב ב

א"ר יוחנן מפני מה זכה אחאב למלכות כ"ב שנה מפני שכיבד את התורה שניתנה בכ"ב אותיות שנאמר (מלכים א כ, ב) וישלח מלאכים אל אחאב מלך ישראל העירה ויאמר לו כה אמר בן הדד כספך וזהבך לי הוא ונשיך ובניך הטובים לי הם כי אם כעת מחר אשלח את עבדי אליך וחפשו את ביתך ואת בתי עבדיך והיה כל מחמד עיניך ישימו בידם ולקחו ויאמר למלאכי בן הדד אמרו לאדוני המלך כל אשר שלחת (לעבדך) [אל עבדך] בראשונה אעשה והדבר הזה לא אוכל לעשות מאי מחמד עיניך לאו ס"ת

כח.

כט.

30. **Tanna Debei Eliyahu Rabbah 9**

(1) Izevel, the daughter of Etba"al king of the Tzidonim and the wife of Achav, at the first time that she was brought before Achav **taught him the ways of idol worshippers and because of her he was brought to become an idolater.**

ל. **תנא דבי אליהו רבה ט'**

אומר איזבל בת אתבעל מלך צידונים אשת אחאב כך אמרו בשעה ראשונה שנכנסה אצל אחאב למדה אותו דרך עבודה לע"א ועל ידה התמכר עצמו לע"א

31. **Sanhedrin 102b**

Rav Nahman says: Ahab was balanced in terms of the mitzvot and transgressions that he performed, as it is stated: "And the Lord said, who shall entice Ahab that he may ascend and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And this one said in this manner, and that one said in that manner" (I Kings 22:20), indicating that it is unclear whether or not he was a full-fledged transgressor. Rav Yosef objects to this statement: This is the person about whom the prophet wrote: "But there was none like Ahab who devoted himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife had incited" (I Kings 21:25). **And we learn in a baraita: Every day she would weigh gold shekels equal to Ahab's weight for idol worship.** And you say he was balanced? Rather, Ahab was generous with his money and did not scrimp, and since he also benefited Torah scholars with his property, the heavenly court expiated half his sins for him. The result was a balance between mitzvot and transgressions.

ל.א. **סנהדרין ק"ב ב**

אמר ר"נ אחאב שקול היה שנאמר (מלכים א כב, כ) ויאמר ה' מי יפתה את אחאב ויעל ויפול ברמות גלעד ויאמר זה בכה וזה אומר בכה מתקיף לה רב יוסף מאן דכתב ביה (מלכים א כא, כה) רק לא היה כאחאב אשר התמכר לעשות הרע בעיני ה' אשר הסתה אותו איזבל אשתו ותנינא בכל יום היתה שוקלת שקלי זהב לעבודת כוכבים ואת אמרת שקול היה אלא אחאב וותרן בממונו היה ומתוך שהנהגה תלמידי חכמים מנכסיו כיפרו לו מחצה

32. **I Kings 18:4**

(4) **When Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the LORD**, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and provided them with food and drink.)

ל.ב. **מלכים א י"ח:ד'**

(ד) וַיְהִי בְּהַכְרִית אֵיזֶבֶל אֶת נְבִיאֵי ה' וַיִּקַּח עֹבַדְיָהוּ מֵאֵה נְבִאִים וַיְחַבֵּאֵם חֲמִשִּׁים אִישׁ בַּמְעֵרָה וְכָל־כֶּלֶם לֶחֶם וּמַיִם:

33. **I Kings 19:2** .לג. מלכים א י"ט:ב'
 (2) Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "Thus and more may the gods do if by this time tomorrow I have not made you like one of them."
 (ב) וַתִּשְׁלַח אֵיזֶבֶל מַלְאָךְ אֶל-אֵלִיָּהוּ לֵאמֹר כֹּה-יַעֲשׂוּן אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסְפוּן כִּי-כָעַת מָחָר אֲשִׁים אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ כַּנֶּפֶשׁ אֶחָד מֵהֶם:
34. **I Kings 21:7** .לד. מלכים א כ"א:ז'
 (7) His wife Jezebel said to him, "Now is the time to show yourself king over Israel. Rise and eat something, and be cheerful; I will get the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite for you."
 (ז) וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֵיזֶבֶל אִשְׁתּוֹ אַתָּה עַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה מְלוּכָה עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל קוּם אֲכַל-לֶחֶם וְיִטֵּב לְבָבְךָ אֲנִי אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ אֶת-כַּרְם נְבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִי:
35. **Abarbanel on I Kings 21:7** .לה. אברבנאל על מלכים א כ"א:ז'
 His wife rebuked him because he **didn't simply demand the plot of land or want to take the field through force**, and she said with surprise "Now are you acting with kingship in Israel?" It wants to say "Are you going to be successful ruling after you don't even have the heart and the strength to impose your will in a small matter like this?! Come! Get up, eat bread, and let your heart be merry because I will get you Navos the Jezreelite's vineyard."
 (א) ואשתו הוכיחתו על אשר לא היה מבקש עלילה ללקחו או יגזלוהו ממנו בחזקה, ואמר' בדרך תמיהה עתה תעש' מלוכה בישראל? ר"ל התצליח למלוכה אחרי שאין לך לב וגבורה לעשות רצונך בדבר קטון כזה? קום אכול לחם ויטב לבך כי אני אתן לך את כרם נבות היזרעאלי.
36. **I Kings 21:14** .לו. מלכים א כ"א:יד'
 (14) Word was sent to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned to death."
 (יד) וַיִּשְׁלַחוּ אֶל-אֵיזֶבֶל לֵאמֹר סָקַל נְבוֹת וַיָּמָת:
37. **I Kings 21:15** .לז. מלכים א כ"א:ט"ו'
 (15) As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Go and take possession of the vineyard which Naboth the Jezreelite refused to sell you for money; for Naboth is no longer alive, he is dead."
 (טו) וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַע אֵיזֶבֶל כִּי-סָקַל נְבוֹת וַיָּמָת וַתֹּאמֶר אֵיזֶבֶל אֶל-אֶחָב קוּם רִשׁ אֶת-כַּרְם | נְבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִי אֲשֶׁר מָאֵן לְתַתְּלֶךָ בְּכֶסֶף כִּי אֵין נְבוֹת חַי כִּי-יָמָת:

38. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER .לח.
 1. What qualities does Jezebel possess?
 2. Do you see her as charismatic?
 3. What punishment does her behavior warrant?
39. **I Kings 21:23** .לט.
 (23) And the LORD has also spoken concerning Jezebel: "The dogs shall devour Jezebel in the field of Jezreel."
מלכים א כ"א:כ"ג
 (כג) וגם־לאִיזָבֵל דָּבַר ה' לֵאמֹר הַפְּלָבִים יֹאכְלוּ אֶת־אִיזָבֵל בְּחַל יְזֵרְעֵאל:
40. **II Kings 9:7** .מ.
 (7) You shall strike down the House of Ahab your master; thus will I avenge on Jezebel the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of the other servants of the LORD.
מלכים ב ט':ז'
 (ז) וְהִכִּיתָה אֶת־בֵּית אַחָאָב אֲדֹנָיִךְ וְנִקְמָתִי דָמַי | עֲבַדְי הַנְּבִיאִים וְדָמַי פְּל־עֲבַדְי ה' מִיַּד אִיזָבֵל:
41. **II Kings 9:30** .מא.
 (30) Jehu went on to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard of it, she painted her eyes with kohl and dressed her hair, and she looked out of the window.
מלכים ב ט':ל'
 (ל) וַיָּבֹא יְהוּא יְזֵרְעֵאלָהּ וְאִיזָבֵל שָׁמְעָה וְתָשָׂם בְּפִיָּה עֵינֶיהָ וְתִיטֵב אֶת־רֹאשָׁהּ וְתִשְׁקֹף בְּעֵד הַחַלּוֹן:
42. **Radak on II Kings 9:30:2** .מב.
 She beautified herself so that she would be pleasing in his eyes and he wouldn't kill her.
רד"ק על מלכים ב' ט':ל':ב'
 (ב) וְתִיטֵב אֶת רֹאשָׁהּ. וְתִתְקַן כְּלוֹמַר קִשְׁטָה אֶת עֲצָמָה כְּדִי שֶׁתִּמְצָא חַן בְּעֵינָיו וְלֹא יִהְרַגָּהּ:
43. **II Kings 9:33** .מג.
 (33) "Throw her down," he said. They threw her down; and her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled her.
מלכים ב ט':ל"ג
 (לג) וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁמְטוּהָ [שְׁמִטוּהָ] וַיִּשְׁמְטוּהָ וַיִּזּוּ מִדָּמָהּ אֶל־הַקִּיר וְאֶל־הַסּוּסִים וַיִּרְמְסוּהָ:

44. **II Kings 9:35**

(35) So they went to bury her; **but all they found of her were the skull, the feet, and the hands.**

מ.ד. מלכים ב ט'ל"ה

(לה) וַיֵּלְכוּ לְקַבְּרָהּ וְלֹא־מָצְאוּ בָּהּ כֶּף אִם־הִגְלָגְלַת וְהַרְגָלִים וְכַפּוֹת הַיָּדַיִם:

45. **Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 17:5**

(5) Whence do we learn (the duty of) showing loving-kindness to mourners? From Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal. The palace of Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, was near the market-place. When any corpse was carried through the market-place, **she would go forth from her palace, and she clapped with the palms of her hands and praised with her mouth, and she followed the corpse ten steps.**

Concerning her, Elijah, be he remembered for good, prophesied (and said): "In the portion of Jezreel shall the dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel" (2 Kings 9:36). But over the limbs which were (employed in) showing loving-kindness, the dogs had no power, as it is said, "And they went || to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands" (2 Kings 9:35).

מ.ה. פרקי דרבי אליעזר י"ז:ה'

(ה) גמילות חסדים מניין אנו למדין לאבלים, מאיזבל, שהיתה ביתה סמוך לשוק וכל מת שהיה עובר בשוק היתה יוצאת מתוך ביתה ומכה בכפי ידיה ומקוננת בפיה ומהלכת עשרה צעדות וכל חתן שהיה עובר בשוק היתה יוצאה מתוך ביתה ומצלצלת בכפי ידיה ומקלסת בפיה ומהלכת עשר צעדות ונתנבא עליה אליהו זכור לטוב הכלבים יאכלו את איזבל בחלק יזרעאל והאברים שהיו גומלי חסד לא שלטו הכלבים בהם שנ' וילכו לקברה ולא מצאו בה וכו'.

46. **Rashi on II Kings 9:35:1** מז.
 (1) **The skull [and] the feet.** Our Rabbis said, that **she would dance before bridegrooms with her hands and feet, and shake her head.** *Because these limbs participated in performing acts of kindness, the merit that she had thereby earned was not forgotten. Therefore these limbs were spared from being devoured by dogs. See Pirkei Derabi Eliezer Chapter 17. Also, she would join funeral processions and clap her hands and lament for the dead. The prophecy in v. 10 above that “no one will bury her,” referring to Ezevel was fulfilled, because most of her body had been devoured, and was not buried.—Radak*
- רש"י על מלכים ב ט'ל"ה:א'
 (א) הגלגלת והרגלים. אמרו רבותינו:
 שְׁהִיְתָה מְרַקְדָּת לְפָנֵי חַתָּנִים בְּיָדֶיהָ
 וּבְרַגְלֶיהָ וּמְכַשְׁפֶּשֶׁת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ.
47. **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER** מז.
 1. What is Jezebel's redeeming quality?
 2. What does this help explain/ what ultimately happens to her?
48. **NEBUCHADNEZZAR** מח.
49. [Excerpt from JewishEncyclopedia.com](https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com) מט.

Nebuchadnezzar's Cruelty

Nebuchadnezzar was most merciless toward the conquered people. By his command the exiles on their way to Babylon were not allowed to stop even for a moment, as the king feared that they would pray during the respite granted them and that God would be willing to help them as soon as they repented (Lam. R. to v. 6; Pesik. R. 28 [ed. Friedmann, p. 135a]). Nebuchadnezzar did not feel safe until the exiles reached the Euphrates, the boundary-line of Babylon. Then he made a great feast on board his ship, while the princes of Judah lay chained and naked by the river. In order to increase their misery he had rolls of the Torah torn and made into sacks, which, filled with sand, he gave to the captive princes to carry (Pesik. R. *l.c.* [ed. Friedmann, p. 135a]; Midr. Teh. cxxxvii.; comp. Buber's remark *ad loc.* and Lam. R. v. 13).

On this occasion Nebuchadnezzar ordered the singers of the Temple to add their music to his feast; but they preferred to bite off their fingers, or even to be killed, rather than to play their sacred music in honor of the Babylonian idols (Pesik. R. 31

[ed. Friedmann, p. 144a], 28 [136a]; comp. Moses, Children of). He heartlessly drove the captives before him, entirely without clothing, until the inhabitants of Bari induced him to clothe them (Pesik. R. *l.c.* [ed. Friedmann, p. 135b]). But even after the heavily burdened Jews finally reached Babylonia they had no rest from the tyrant, who massacred thousands of youths whose beauty had inflamed the passion of the Babylonian women—a passion which did not subside until the corpses were stamped upon and mutilated (Sanh. 92b; comp. Ezekiel in Rabbinical Literature). Nebuchadnezzar carried to Babylon, together with the Jews, cedar-trees which he had taken from Lebanon (Lam. R. i. 4), and millstones which he made the captive youths bear (*l.c.* v. 13). Even the Jews who had sought refuge from the Babylonians in Ammon and Moab or in Egypt did not escape Nebuchadnezzar, who, on conquering Egypt, carried all the Jews in that country, including Baruch and Jeremiah, to Babylonia (Midr. 'Eser Galuyyot, ed. Grünhut, *l.c.* iii. 14; Seder 'Olam R. xxvi.). Nebuchadnezzar was equally victorious in his expedition against Tyre, whose king, Hiram, his stepfather, he dethroned and put to a painful death (Lev. R. xviii. 2; Yalk., Ezek. 367).

50. **Sanhedrin 96a**

Nebuchadnezzar was the scribe of Baladan, and at that time he was not there. When he came there he said to the other scribes: How did you write the king's message? They said to him: We wrote this: Greetings to King Hezekiah, greetings to the city of Jerusalem, and greetings to the great God, as we were commanded. Nebuchadnezzar said to the scribes: You called him: The great God, and you wrote Him at the end of the list of greetings? He said: Rather, write this: Greetings to the great God, greetings to the city of Jerusalem, and greetings to King Hezekiah. The scribes said to Nebuchadnezzar: The one who reads the letter, let him be the messenger. You gave the advice; you correct the text. Nebuchadnezzar pursued the messenger to take the letter from him and revise it. When he ran four paces, the angel Gabriel came and stopped his pursuit. Rabbi Yoḥanan says: If Gabriel had not come and stopped his pursuit there would have been no remedy for the enemies of the Jewish people, a euphemism for the Jewish people. Had Nebuchadnezzar succeeded in revising the letter, his reward would have been so great that he would have been able to destroy the Jewish people, as he desired.

.ג סנהדרין צ"ו א

נבוכדנאצר ספריה דבלאדן הוה ההיא שעתא לא הוה התם כי אתא אמר להו היכי כתביתו אמרו ליה הכי כתבינן אמר להו קריתו ליה אלהא רבא וכתביתו ליה לבסוף אמר אלא הכי כתובו שלם לאלהא רבא שלם לקרתא דירושלם שלם למלכא חזקיה אמרי ליה קריינא דאיגרתא איהו ליהוי פרוונקא רהט בתריה כדרהיט ארבע פסיעות אתא גבריאל ואוקמיה אמר ר' יוחנן אילמלא (לא) בא גבריאל והעמידו לא היה תקנה לשונאיהם של ישראל

Excerpt from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's Essay "Yoma 53a-b: Taking Three Steps Back"

According to the *ge'onim*, a person who is praying is surrounded by four cubits of Divine presence. When he completes his prayers he must step out of that setting by walking back three steps (three steps from the middle of four *amot* (cubits) would remove him from that area). Rav Yosef Karo in his *Bet Yosef* quotes Rav Hai Ga'on as explaining that this relates to the three levels of stones that were on the eastern side on which the *kohanim* walked up and down. **The Gra and the Maharsha relate this to the story that the Gemara tells about Nebuchadnezzar who honored God by taking three steps on his behalf, for which he received great reward.**

According to the Gemara (Sanhedrin 96a) Nebuchadnezzar served as a secretary and scribe for a previous Babylonian monarch. Once, when Nebuchadnezzar was absent from work, another one of the royal scribes drafted a letter to be sent to the king of Yehudah, Hizkiyahu. The letter began: “Greetings to King Hizkiyahu! Greetings to the city of Jerusalem! Greetings to the great God!”

When Nebuchadnezzar returned to work and discovered how the letter was written, he objected, saying “you call Him ‘the great God,’ and then you mention Him last?!”

Nebuchadnezzar insisted that the letter be redone, writing: “Greetings to the great God! Greetings to the city of Jerusalem! Greetings to King Hizkiyahu!”

The problem was that the messenger had already been dispatched to Jerusalem with the first version of the letter in his hand. Nebuchadnezzar ran out to call the messenger back and redo the letter, running three steps to catch the messenger. **The Talmud credits this behavior for his ascension to power.**

TAKEAWAYS

- It is well established in our tradition that even villains have redeeming qualities.
- One can never know the full scope of a person- even if they appear to be shallow, cruel or evil.
- Seemingly small actions can garner great reward.
- How much the more so someone who diligently applies himself/ herself in the pursuit of keeping God's commandments!

