



**TORAS AVIGDOR**  
AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

# The Story of **PURIM**

As told by  
**R' Avigdor Miller**



**Thanks to our dear friends  
for making this possible**

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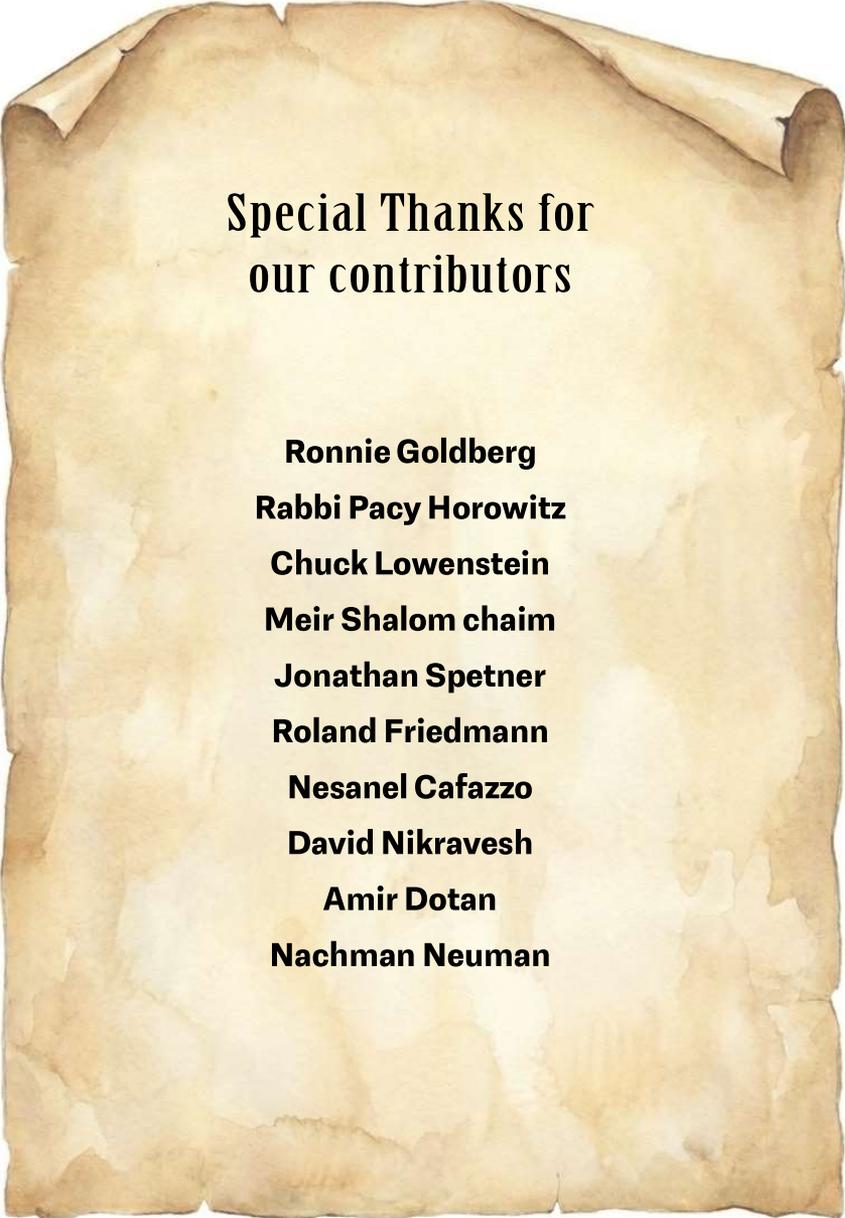
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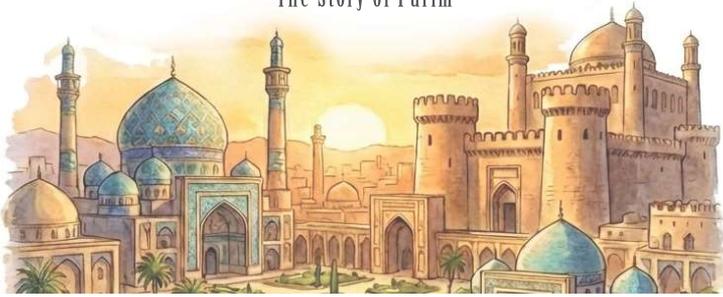
In memory of my Great Grandfather R' Akiva Besser, who was niftar  
ל"ד אדר ב', תשנ"ב - March 19, 1992 on Purim. He brought his European  
Chassidic background to the post war American community to impart  
the vibrancy and authenticity of Torah and Mitzvos.

יהי זכרו ברוך



**Special Thanks for  
our contributors**

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## Publisher's Preface

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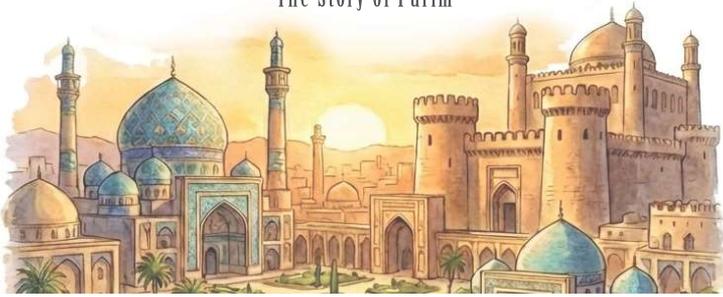
*There is something unique and special about the way a Gadol BaTorah like R' Avigdor Miller says over a story from Tanach. Of course, the wonderful insights he sprinkles throughout his narrative give us a deeper understanding of the tale being told and the lessons it is meant to convey but in addition, one can sense how with his excellent grasp of the details, his profound emunah, and his inimitable koach hatziur, he is practically traveling back in time and reliving the story as he tells it. We the listeners, are transported along with him on his uplifting journey, and there's no question that upon our return we will not be the same.*

*In an attempt to capture some degree of that elevated experience, we present here a written version of the Story of Purim as told by R' Miller. The material was culled from various lectures and writings, and then rearranged into one sequential narrative. In a small number of places, a word or two has been changed or added in order to provide for an easier read, but by and large these are the exact words of R' Miller as he had originally said them. Because this is*

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*not merely a commentary on Megillas Esther but a telling of the story of Purim, some of R' Miller's valuable thoughts on the Megillah were left out of this particular work so that the story could be told along with the Megillah. The chapters correspond to the perakim of Megilas Esther, allowing one to follow along in the megillah as he reads through the story.*

*May this riveting retelling of the beloved story of Purim have its desired effect, and bring us all to greater heights in our avodas Hashem.*



# Introduction

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(Adapted from the words of R' Avigdor Miller  
in his book, "Torah-Nation")

## **Megillas Esther**

*Megillas Esther, which records the episode of Purim, is a straightforward account – not a parable – and yet even a superficial examination convinces us that it is not what it seems to be. Of course, it was written with ruach hakodesh (Megillah7a), and is suffused with the deepest piety. But unlike the rest of Tanach which speaks openly of Hakadosh Baruch Hu at every opportunity, Megillas Esther conspicuously avoids any mention of His name, even where the text requires it. For instance, when Esther says (4:16) “Go gather all the Jews who are to be found in Shushan and fast for me etc.,” there is no question that she also said “and cry out to Hashem.” Yet these words, and many like them, are not in the megillah. In this respect, Megillas Esther is unique among all the books of Tanach.*

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This remarkable phenomenon demonstrates that the megillah was originally written to be handled by the officials of the Persian Empire. It therefore could not contain G-d's name because it was liable to be thrown away or otherwise mistreated. For the same reason, it was necessary to make the megillah acceptable to the Persians, and so a number of important matters were omitted. Mordechai and Esther disseminated the megillah in the form of a royal letter (see 9:29), in order to 1) gain the universal participation of the Jews in the observance of Purim, and 2) to impress the gentiles with the lesson of what happens to Am Yisroel's enemies. So the constraints of galus required that the megillah be written in this cryptic manner. Therefore, it is only by recourse to the traditions of our Chachomim, that we are able to read between the lines and discover the true story of Purim.

By extension, the necessity of omitting Hakadosh Baruch Hu's name from the megillah illustrates the hidden hand of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in Am Yisroel's history. As the Gemara states (Chullin139b), "Where is Esther hinted to in the Torah? 'I shall hide (astir) My face on that day' (Dvarim 31:18)." Whereas in the earlier generations Hashem openly "made His countenance shine" (Bamidbar 6:25) upon His people, now His miracles were concealed in the wrappings of seemingly natural causes. But whether open or concealed, we must recognize that all that transpires is nothing but the hand of Hashem; "Yado netuyahaleinu" (Chagigah 5b) – His hand is still outstretched.

### **Megillas Esther**

When we begin the history of Purim, it is important to keep in mind, among other things, one great principle as follows: it's stated in Devorim **הן לה' אלקיך השמים ושמי השמים** – behold to Hashem belong the heavens and the heavens above the heavens. All space belongs to Me, says Hashem **רק באבותיך חשק ה'** Hashem have any desire, **בכם כיום, לאהבה אותם** – to love them, **הזוה** – and you, as of this day.

What is the *possuk* saying? Hakodosh Boruch Hu declares He is the master of a very great, limitless, universe. Nothing of *gashmiyus* is limitless, but it's limitless as far as we are concerned. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu is their Creator and He is in charge of the operation of this vast reality. And yet, His interest, His delight is only in our forefathers.

That's a stunning statement, a thundering declaration. It would be necessary for us to sit and to philosophize all our days in order that it should penetrate our consciousness. Who are we? A little spatter of protoplasm on the surface of this tiny, little globe. And there are huge worlds in space, trillions of them, bigger than this earth. This earth is a dust speck in the universe. And on this dust speck, you'll have to use a super magnifying glass to discover the protoplasm which constitutes humanity. And among humanity there's a tiny fraction, which is the Am Yisroel. And here Hakodosh Boruch Hu declares that His interest in the universe is only in your forefathers. That's what it means to be a Jew.

You'll have to wrench your mind out of all the comparisons that mankind makes, of all calculations, all

proportions, all frames of reference because this is entirely opposed to everything that not only the world has been thinking, but to what we have been thinking. Certainly, we say, it's important that there's an Am Yisroel. Certainly they have an important place in the world. But do you mean to say that Hakodosh Boruch Hu removes His thoughts from everything else and concentrates them only on Avrohom, Yitzchok v'Yankev? Isn't that a very big exaggeration of sentiment, of national sentiment?

Therefore, it is our duty to understand that if we don't appreciate this principle, we will not understand anything of all that's related in Tanach. We won't understand our history. That's at the root of everything that took place not only on Purim, that took place in all the days since we were a nation, that the world was only the stage on which the main actor, the Am Yisroel was supposed to play out his role.

Now, Megillas Esther illustrates this. If we study it in this light, it'll help us somewhat to assimilate, to acquire, to be saturated to some extent with this concept.

But first we have to mention one more *possuk*: הוא ה' אלקינו בכל הארץ משפטיו – He is Hashem, our G-d, in all the world are His judgments. What's the connection between the first half of this *possuk* and the second half of the *possuk*? He is Hashem our G-d and His judgments are on all the world. So people think it means we're praising Him, His power is in all the world. That's not the *pshat*. The *pshat* is, He, Hashem is Our G-d, and *therefore* whatever He does in

the world, all of the judgments in the world are in the role of our G-d, which means He does it because of us.

Again, let's study that *possuk*. הוא ה' אלקינו – Who is He? הוא ה' – The Borei who made everything come into reality; it's only His will that exists in the universe. כי הוא אמר ויהי – He said and it came into being, הוא ציוה – He commanded, ויעמד – and it arose. ברבר ה' שמים נעשו. – By the word of Hashem the heavens were made, וברוח פיו כל צבאם – by the wind of His mouth, the breath of His mouth all the hosts came into being, לעולם ה' דברך ניצב בשמים – forever Hashem, it's Your word that stands in the heavens. It's because You issued Your word, that's why there are heavens and the heavens continue to exist because Your word is there. כוננת ארץ ותעמד – You established the world and therefore it remains standing.

Now, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the source of the energy that caused everything to come into existence. You know everything is energy. Not only processes of nature are energy, all matter is a form of energy. א-ל means energy. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a *Keil zon u'mefarnes*, which means all of His energies are devoted to the purpose of *chesed*. אתה גיבור לעולם ה' מכלכל חיים בחסד – all your gevuros is for the purpose of *chesed*. Now all these gevuros come from the *Keil Elyon*, the uppermost source of energy. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the One who creates energy.

And so when you see a dime, a piece of silver, you must know that it's nothing but energy. If you would exploit it according to the proper method, the metal would turn into energy. Of course you have to be careful if you do that because there's so much energy in half of a dime that it

could explode a city once it's let loose. All that energy is crystallized into a little bit of matter and it's all from the Keil Elyon, the uppermost energy.

And now the *possuk* comes along and says, do you know what all this is about, this tremendous release of energy that came into the universe at that time, trillions and trillions of tons of horsepower in energy were released at that time? It was only for one purpose, הוא ה' אלקינו – He's our Hashem.

וּבְלֵיל הָאָרֶץ מִשְׁפֵּטוֹ – and therefore all of His judgments, all of His acts in the entire universe are done only because of us. הֵן לְה' אֱלֹקֵיךְ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם – everything belongs to Hashem, the vastness of space, but רַק בְּאֲבוֹתֶיךָ חָשַׁק ה' – yet only in your forefathers has Hashem desired. They're His only interest in the world and because of them, His interest is in their progeny, בְּכֵן כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה – to this day, Hashem looks upon us with that love that He had for the fathers.

Like the Rambam says, any benefits that ever happened to our people and ever will happen to our people, any good things, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is doing only because of the Avos. Nechemya said, אֲתָה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל צְבָאָם, אֲתָה הוּא שֶׁבַחְתָּ – You created everything, הָאָרֶץ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ – and you chose Avrohom. You didn't choose the far-off stars, You didn't choose any galaxies. You chose only one human being, Avrohom. And so we have to understand when we read anything in Tanach and *lehavdil* when you read anything in any history, that it is all because of the Am Yisroel that this is happening.

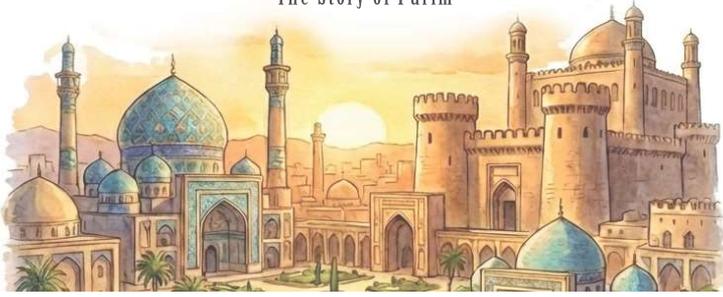
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And with that introduction we can begin to read the Megillah and understand it from a true Torah perspective—the perspective that we are the history of the world and that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is manipulating everything, all world events, for *amo Yisroel*.

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In the Gemara there is a question, why don't you say Hallel on Purim? The Gemara answers a number of *teirutzim*. One *teirutz* the Gemara gives, is “*Kriyasah zu hi Haleilah*” – the reading of the *megillah* is its Hallel. Because what is Hallel? Saying Hallel means to become more aware of the wonders of Hashem. If you study the *megillah*, that's one of the ways of becoming aware of the wonders of Hashem.

We have to study the Megillas Esther, and see from the beginning, the whole plan of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.



# CHAPTER 1

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## **The Royal Feast**

We begin “*Vayehi beyemei Achashveirosh,*” – and it was in the days of Achashveirosh. And that’s the system of Torah history, that it begins with a *vav*. Because everything is connected in the plan of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. There are no accidents, nothing occurs of itself; everything is a result of previous planning, and everything is a preface for future events. And that’s why every narrative in the Tanach is *vav* – except at the beginning; *Bereishis* doesn’t have a *vav*.

Achashveirosh made a great feast, in the third year of his kingdom. Why didn’t he make it in the first year? So the *Chachamim* tell us that he was uneasy at the beginning. He didn’t sit comfortably on his throne. Now what caused his discomfort? Was he afraid that somebody would usurp his power? No. Achashveirosh had a thought that was picking away at his mind and left him ill at ease. Achashveirosh, the Gemara tells us, was concerned about the prophecy of Yirmiyah Hanavi who had foretold that seventy years

after the *churban*, the Beis Hamikdash would be restored. He knew all about it. It was a famous prophecy; the whole Jewish nation was counting the years from the days of Yirmiyah. There was no secret about it! The Chachomim counted and Achashveirosh, *lehavdil*, also was counting,

But the problem was how to *calculate* these seventy years, because there were a number of possible calculations. Achashveirosh and his sages calculated, and finally it seemed to them that the time had come. Therefore, the first two years he was afraid that the prophecy would yet come true, and so he was uneasy in the first two years. But in the third year of his kingdom, according to his calculation, the time was up and nothing happened. The Jews were not restored, and the Beis Hamikdash was not rebuilt, and now he leaned back and he felt relieved. And then he made a great feast.

And that was a feast not merely to celebrate his inauguration; it was three years late. He made a great feast for a purpose: As a preparation for a great undertaking he was preparing. He wanted to gain the confidence of his people. After all, he had a varied people – a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. They spoke every language and they were of every race and so it was a problem: How could he get them all united in one grand plan to carry out his dearest wish? You must know that what was then never happened again. All the Jews in the world were under the power of one man. Never again did it happen. When Hitler started out, all the Jews weren't in Europe. And even those in Europe were not all under his power. Some were protected by Soviet Russia. Some were protected by Great Britain. Some were protected by Spain! Spain didn't give the

Jews up. Some were protected in Switzerland. Some were saved in Italy. And it's because Hitler didn't have them all in his power, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us a remnant.

Now Achashveirosh, he was the last one to have this glorious opportunity. And therefore, because he had this opportunity, he invited all the nations to a great banquet. Now, the likes of this banquet was never seen again. Because what the anti-Semites will do to carry out their purposes has no equal in history. One hundred and eighty days of feasting. Did you ever hear of the like? And it costed a *fortune* – a *king's* fortune. It was free! Wine flowed like water. And they were so enthusiastic in pouring wine down the people's throats, because they wanted everybody to be convivial. You know wine makes everybody equal – they all level down to the level of the ground. And so it was necessary to say “*ein ones*,” nobody should be forced to drink. It means there was so much that you would drink more than you wanted. The waiters would force you. And the purpose was, “*beharoso es osher kevod malchuso*” – to demonstrate his power and to make all the nations have confidence in him, and to unite them for the great day – like the Germans used to say, “*Der tag*.” *Der tag* means the great day will come. And so, this unequaled banquet was the preparation for that great day of which Achashveirosh was dreaming. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu, *yoshev baShamayim yischak* – the One Who dwells in Heaven is laughing. Because He was behind the scenes and He was pulling wires. And He was the One Who put Achashveirosh on the throne, and therefore He was making His own preparations.

### **Vashti's Refusal**

At that great banquet a *kilkul* took place. A snag took place in the plans. Achashveirosh had many things to show; “*beharoso es osher kevod malchuso*” – he showed the wealth, the glory of his kingdom. He had something else: He had an exceptionally beautiful queen. That’s another way of leveling all the nations, because all the *goyim* are enthusiastic over that subject. So therefore, when Achashveirosh thought of his great treasure – he had a beauty which was unequaled, it seemed to him – so he told Queen Vashti to come and make a public appearance.

Now Vashti wasn’t an upstart like Achashveirosh. Achashveirosh was a nobody who had gained the throne. Hakadosh Baruch Hu had elevated him for His purpose. But Vashti was from the royal line, she was a princess. And in general she resented being married to Achashveirosh. Only he was a king, what don’t you do in order to be the queen? So she married him. But she always looked down on him. That’s how it was in the ancient days, the bluebloods looked down on the plebeians.

And therefore when he sent an order that Vashti should come in and display herself to the nations, so she sent a message, “Nothing doing.” “*Vatema’ein hamalkah Vashti.*” They waited and waited, and waited and waited. No queen. So the king sent somebody – “What’s the delay?!” The man came and said they couldn’t get hold of her yet. They didn’t want to tell the king this bad news. The king sent somebody else. Finally, the king sent a trusted man who came and said “The queen said she’s not coming!” And he said it aloud!

*Vatema(ahah)'ein*, that's how the *trop* goes. *Vatemea'ei(ei) n hamalkah Vashti*. She didn't just refuse – she *refu(uuu) sed!* She didn't just say, "I'm not going." She sent a *message* back, a *bitter message!* She gave him a slap in the face with her words. She said "What do you think I am? It's against the laws of Persia for a woman to display herself to men." That was a law of Persia! "I'm not disobeying the laws of our country. What do you think I am?!" And she gave it to him.

The king sat there stunned. He turned white. Josephus said, he arose and broke off the whole banquet! He stalked out in such an anger, that everybody saw that the entire celebration had been smashed to smithereens. You understand what's happening here? Everybody is going to go home to his province and say "That's a king? He can't even rule his wife! Can he control *us*? A thousand miles away he'll tell us what to do? In his own *palace* nobody obeys him." It was a thunderbolt! It was like hitting a man over the head with an *anvil!* He was squashed.

### ***Memuchan's Advice***

So in the midst of the banquet, a message came and the king summoned his seven counsellors. Everybody knew something serious was taking place; in the midst of the banquet! People sitting there stopped drinking. Although they had been inebriated, now they became sober! They saw something serious was taking place! And there was a meeting.

Now you have to know, that the seven gentile counsellors were not the first ones to be consulted. Achashveirosh was

looking for a doormat. He was looking for counsellors who would give him advice how to deal with Vashti, and these counsellors would subsequently bear the brunt of revenge. Because Vashti had a family, a royal family. And anyone who would counsel the king to get rid of her – you know, you don't depose the queen just like this; in the ancient days the queen was deposed by separating her head from her neck. That's the way they deposed the queen. Also a king. No king was allowed to abdicate and go into retirement. In the good old days, they disconnected the head from the neck. Now if anyone would give such a counsel to the king, it was the most dangerous undertaking because the family would seek revenge.

And therefore, before anything the king turned to the most convenient doormat: to the Sages of Israel (that's what the Gemara tells us), and he asked them for counsel. But the Sages of Israel were foxy enough, and they said to the king "Look, once we had wisdom when we were in our own country. But we are in exile now and it's like wine. If you move wine around and shake it up, so the leaves, the dregs at the bottom swim up and the wine is no longer clear. And therefore our heads are not what they used to be. We don't have any wisdom anymore, and we're not capable of counseling you." And therefore they extricated themselves from this trap.

Then the king turned to his gentile counsellors. They also understood what lay in store for them, that the king would someday regret – the Gemara says, tomorrow he'll regret it and he'll take revenge on us! But among the counselors there was one who spoke up. He wasn't the

oldest, and he wasn't the wisest. "Vayomer Memuchan." (Memuchan means the one who was *muchan leparanius*, prepared for punishment). He said that the king should make a proclamation, and it should be written in all the languages of the one hundred and twenty-seven province. And they should send it out by couriers, by runners, all over the habitable world, from India to Ethiopia. And what should these proclamations say? That every man should be the ruler in his house, and the language of the house should be the language of the husband. Because in such a varied kingdom, they married from one province to another, so an Ethiopian married an Indian. So if the husband was Hindu, the language was Hindu and he should be the boss.

### **The Effect of the Letters**

So now picture what took place. Eventually these letters were posted up on the walls of the streets in Calcutta, and the Indians were standing around reading a letter – an official missive sent from the capital and it's signed by the emperor himself. And what's the great news? That a man should be the ruler in his house. And they were standing and bursting their sides with laughter. They said *mai kamashma lan?* Today of course, if a president did that, he'd be ousted by the next day! But in those days, they were ready to cart him off to the insane asylum! *Mai kamashma lan? Peshita!* Where do you find a husband who *wasn't* the ruler in his house?! And all over the kingdom, he was the laughingstock. Of course you couldn't laugh on the street; they laughed in their sleeves. They came home and they sat down, and they laughed and laughed and laughed.

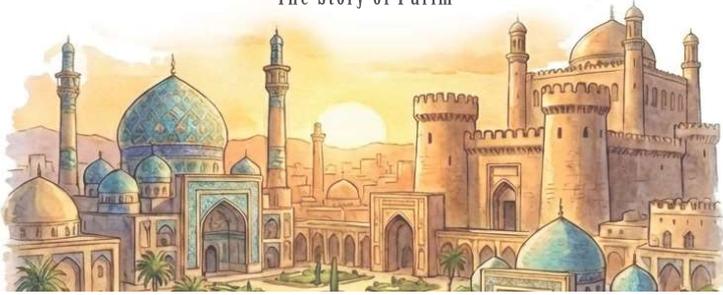
Now the Gemara says, listen to this: *ilmalei igros rishonos*, if not for these first letters, *lo neshtayer meiYisroel sarid upalit*, there wouldn't have remained a remnant of the Jewish people. These letters saved the Jewish people. Do you know why? Because later, when Haman (Memuchan) gained from the king *another* decree, that on a certain day all the Jews of the empire should be destroyed, and that the letters should be sent out in all the languages, so the letters were posted on the walls and the people again were standing there and looking at the letters and said "another lunacy." "It's just a joke," they said. "This man doesn't know what he's saying." And therefore they ignored the letter.

Now you have to know that when anti-Semites – anti-Semites by the way are not lacking in any place. It happens to be that Jews have such a *mazel* that all over the world there are people who envy them; there are wicked people who don't like righteous people. They don't like people who don't mingle with them, who don't drink with them, who don't intermarry with them, don't do wicked things with them. Jews have enemies. Now these enemies, when they would have read these letters and if they would have been the *first* letters to come and the *only* letters, they wouldn't have waited for the appointed day! As soon as they knew where the wind was blowing, they would have gotten busy and sharpened their axes and sharpened their knives, and *the next day* – they wouldn't have waited – the next day they would have gotten busy, they would have done the job! But when they saw the letters, although it was a temptation to many of them, but they hesitated! After all, it was a kingdom of law and order. And therefore, they didn't dare

to do anything! Because they saw that there was somebody irresponsible there in the capital. It couldn't be the king himself – there must be some joker there who is doing things like this, a lunatic. Only what can you do? So they didn't take any action! So if not for the first letters, then the last letters would have accomplished their job immediately without any delay, they wouldn't have waited for the day! But who was the one who prepared the first letters? Haman. He prepared them to foil his second letters. That's what we're learning from the *megillah*. That Hakadosh Baruch Hu's Name is not mentioned, but He is very much on the job.

### **Vashti's End**

Vashti was sentenced to death, before everybody went home, because it's necessary for them to know that the king is the boss. Now, when you kill a queen it's not a small matter; even a *small* queen. But a queen of a big empire, it's an international tragedy. Whatever it was, whether you sympathized with her or not, it was a tragedy. A king should execute *his own queen*?! It put such a blemish on the character of Achashveirosh – even though he sought to save his reputation as a ruler by doing this – it so blackened his face, that he was downcast and he fell into a distemper. As a result of the execution of Vashti, first of all the banquet was disbanded. Everybody went home, they lowered their heads; they were talking to each other and whispering. The news spread all over the empire when they came home. It was the talk *meiHodu v'ad Kush*, what happened in the king's palace! That's a ruination for the king's name. The Queen Vashti had been executed. That was the message that went out over the entire inhabited world.



## CHAPTER 2

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### **The Search for a New Queen**

Now “*achar hadevarim haeileh*,” after these things quieted down, “*keshoch chamas hamelech*,” when the king’s anger became quieted down, “*zachar es Vashti*,” he remembered Vashti. Now there was a fear of the backlash. He remembered Vashti and what happened, “*ve’es asher nigzar alehah*,” and the decree. He was thinking “Was it right that I made such a decree against Vashti?”

So now, Haman became alarmed! All the others, who hadn’t given any advice to get rid of Vashti, they weren’t concerned. They played it safe! They hadn’t said anything! But Memuchan, he was *afraid* now! So when Haman saw that the king was now thinking about his old wife – “Vashti! Ay ay ay, what happened to Vashti?! Why did I do it?” – Haman was the one to get it! So Haman got busy. Haman went around, and he told the palace people tell the king the following (it was all Haman’s plan!): “*Vayomru na’arei hamelech mesharsav...*” Now the *na’arei hamelech* don’t

say anything like that. Such things, a scheme to choose a queen, doesn't come from the *na'arei hamelech*. You have to understand that. The servants of the king, they don't think of such schemes of giving the king a new queen. But *Haman* was behind it all. *Haman* was afraid, if the king remains a bachelor too long – he wasn't a bachelor by the way; he had plenty of women! But if the queen was still absent, so the king will finally remember *Haman* too! Not only he'll remember *Vashti*, he'll remember *Haman* too! He didn't *want* to be remembered!

So *Haman* started circulating in the palace and inciting the king's close servants to tell him to take a new queen. It was *Haman's* idea. He's the one who said it: "*Umalchusah yiten hamelech lere'usah hatovah mimenah.*" He's the one who incited them to tell the king, look for a queen. And so the entire plan came from *Haman*, to make a beauty contest and find the one that's the most outstanding to be a new queen.

### ***Mordechai Appears on the Scene***

Now, all of a sudden "*ish Yehudi hayah beShushan Habirah etc.*" – *Mordechai* appears on the scene. Now we have to understand that *Mordechai* had no business in *Shushan Habirah*. *Mordechai* was sitting in the *yeshiva*. He was sitting and teaching *Torah* all the time. He had nothing at all to do with *Shushan Habirah*. Only *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said I need him, *Hu Hashem Elokeinu bechol ha'aretz m ishpatav*, and He transferred *Mordechai* to *Shushan Habirah*. What happened? You have to know that *Mordechai* was the leader of the *Sanhedrin*, and he was the one who

carried on his shoulders the responsibility for the Klal Gemara. In those days it wasn't like today, a man is an *adam gadol*, a *rosh yeshiva*, and his mind is closed to all that goes on outside of the *yeshiva*. In those days it was different. The Gemara says *talmid chacham, kol milei demasa alei* – anything that happens in the town, he knows about. He notices everything.

And Mordechai, as he's sitting in the *yeshiva*, when people brought him news, Mordechai was paying attention to everything that happened. Now Mordechai heard that there was a Memuchan, an Amaleki, a man who was known to be a *tzorer haYehudim* – that was his name, he was famous for that – who suddenly was catapulted into the king's favor because he was the one who had given the counsel to the king. And Mordechai became alarmed now. If Haman, that's Memuchan, is now so influential, then I have to move now to the palace. I have to start being *osek in tzarchei tzibbur* even though it means I'm interrupting my learning, because it's a *sakanah* for the Klal Yisroel. That's the secret of *ish Yehudi hayah beShushan Habirah*. That's how he came there.

### **A Queen is Chosen**

“*Vayehi omeines Hadassah hi Esther etc.*” – And Mordechai had raised Esther. And one day when Esther— she was still a young girl—was sent by her uncle who was raising her up because she was an orphan (her uncle Mordechai sent her out on an errand, some *devar mitzvah*), so a *shaliach* of the king saw her in the street and he said “That's the one.” Now you have to know that was a *neis*, because Esther was not a beauty. *Esther yerakrokes haysah* – she was somewhat

pale, somewhat swarthy, she wasn't a beauty. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu decided she has to be a beauty. And when the *shaliach* of the king saw her, he almost fainted from *simchah*. "That's the one!" It was a *neis*! Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave her *chein*, "*vatehi Esther noseis chein be'einei kol roehah*"! It was a *nes*! She found favor. She wasn't supposed to find favor, the Gemara says. She didn't put any pink on her cheeks, she didn't blue her eyes – she did nothing at all! And therefore, Esther – had it been in normal times – would have been ignored. But because Hakadosh Baruch Hu is sitting behind the scenes and He was trying to carry out Haman's "prophecy," of "*umalchusah yiten hamelech lere'usah hatovah mimenah*," so "*vatehi Esther noseis chein be'eino kol roehah*." Anybody who saw her decided that she is the prettiest woman they ever saw. It's a remarkable thing, because she *wasn't*. And so the search stopped. There's no use looking any more – we *have* her. Only to be *yotzei*, they pulled in a lot of girls from all the places, but they knew beforehand, "this is the one."

"*Vatilkach Esther el haMelech Achashveirosh*," and it says "*vatisa chein vechessed lefanav*," and she gained the greatest favor in his eyes, "*vayasem keser malchus beroshah*," he put the crown of the kingdom on her head, "*vayamlichehah tachas Vashti*," and he made her the queen instead of Vashti. So it's all over! She is the one that's chosen! Now the great contest, the great beauty contest that Achashveirosh had made when he had taken so many girls from so many countries to find who is fitting to be the successor to Vashti, it's all over! He put the crown on Esther's head and he made her reign instead of Vashti.

Then it says “*vaya’as hamelech mishteh gadol*,” and the king made a great banquet for all of his officers and his servants and he called it “the banquet of Esther” – that’s how it was proclaimed. It means Esther was fully installed, inaugurated as queen. She was crowned, and now there was a big banquet to celebrate the coronation of Esther! And “*vehanachah lamedinos asah*,” and the king made a great rebate in taxes to all the countries over which he ruled, everybody should be happy (we’ll soon see why he did that). He sent messengers, a reduction in taxes – everybody loves that – in honor of Esther. And he gave gifts. Not only he reduced taxes but he sent *gifts* to all the officials who *couldn’t* come, in all the countries. He sent *gifts* to them. Now, it’s settled! It was all over. Esther was chosen.

### **Esther is Silent**

And now the king wanted to know, “Esther, where do you come from?” And Esther didn’t say anything. Because she was loyal to her *rebbe* (Mordechai) who said “*you should not say*.” Now listen to the words: “*Ubehikabetz besulos sheinis*,” when the virgins were collected a second time, “*uMordechai yoshev beshar hamelech*,” and Mordechai was sitting in the king’s gate (Mordechai was sitting among the notables in the king’s gate. He could have gone home but he was sitting there for a purpose – we’ll soon see). “*Ein Esther magedes moladetah*,” Esther refused to tell of her origin, “*ka’asher tzivah alehah Mordechai*,” like Mordechai commanded her.

Now we have to understand this, as follows. Mordechai may not have been a prophet, but he certainly had *ruach*

*hakodesh*. And we know *chacham adif minavi* – a *chacham* in a certain sense is better than a *navi*. A *navi* needs the help of Hakadosh Baruch Hu to foresee the future. A *chacham* is *eizehu chacham haroeh es hanolad*; he is trained to look ahead. Now Mordechai knew what was doing in this kingdom. Had Esther said that she is a *Yehudis*, then the Am Yisroel would have been the recipient of a great torrent of hatred from *all over* the Persian Empire. Every disappointed king, every angry prince, when his daughter would come back shamed, he would say “Who *did* get it? Was it a queen or a princess of some great noble empire?” “A Jewess.” “A Jewess?! He rejected you, *my daughter*, a princess for a Jewess?!” They would gnash their teeth, and who knows *what* would have happened. But this is certain: It would have incurred a universal hatred. This wasn’t the *only* reason, but that was one of the reasons that Mordechai said “Keep quiet. We don’t want to gain enemies.” There were other reasons.

A *chashveirosh* understood, however, that Esther was going to begin her reign with a great many enemies. And therefore when Esther was crowned as queen, *Achashveirosh* made a special banquet for all the princes. Those that could come were honored, and those who couldn’t come were also given gifts, and *all over the empire* everybody rejoiced because they had a rebate on taxes. And everybody said “blessings on that queen’s head”! And Esther became famous throughout the empire. A woman said to her husband, “When are you going to give the king one fifth of your produce, that you have to give him this year?” So the farmer said “Good news! This year, I don’t have to give one

fifth! I just give one tenth!” “One tenth? Why?!” “Because of the queen; in honor of the queen.” “The queen?! A blessing on her head!” said his wife. Everybody heard the good news, and everybody said “*hanachah lehamedinos*,” a rebate to all the provinces in honor of Esther?! Blessings on Esther’s head. So Esther at that time – this the king understood too – gained the affection of the entire populace.

Only there was one person who was still displeased and that was the king himself. Because he wanted to know who Esther was. Was she fit to be a queen for him? Who knows whom he picked?! Maybe he picked a gypsy. Maybe he picked an illegitimate child. Maybe he picked somebody whose father was a criminal – he might show up some day in the palace, an idiot, and he’ll be put to shame! And so, the king decided to start a *second* campaign to choose a wife. Once more he issued a call that the *besulos* should come, *despite* the fact that he already had crowned Esther. And he thought, maybe now if Esther sees that we’re looking for somebody who is maybe better, maybe somebody who will be able to trot out a pedigree too, so maybe that will open up her mouth! And she’ll tell me perhaps – if she *does* come from a family that is worth telling, we’ll discover who it is! That’s what the Gemara says, that the king made the second beauty contest in order to force Esther to open her mouth. But “*behikabetz besulos sheinis*,” when they gathered the virgins a second time, Esther sat tight! “*Ein Esther magedes*,” Esther refused to tell!

Now we have to know Esther wasn’t eager to be a queen. Esther *hated*, she *abominated*, she *dreaded* the role of queen. She would have preferred that they throw her out

of the palace, and she'd run back and hide for the rest of her life from this great beast, this bear Achashveirosh (Megillah 11a). But if Esther would be rejected she wouldn't leave the palace on her own two feet. She knew she'd be carried out *in a box*, like Vashti was carried out! And that wasn't what Mordechai *wanted*. Mordechai said, "You're there? You have to *stay* there! Hashem *sent* you there. You think it's an accident, that a Jewish girl became crowned as a queen?! You're being prepared for a very great role! History, is waiting for you! You have to make it your business to remain alive, and remain *there!*" And so Esther had this great test! And still "*ein Esther magedes,*" Esther still refused to tell. Now how she did it, I can't say. But "*es ma'amar Mordechai Esther osah,*" what Mordechai had told her she did, "*ka'asher haysah beamnah ito,*" just as she was when she was being trained by him.

### **Bigson & Seresh's Blunder**

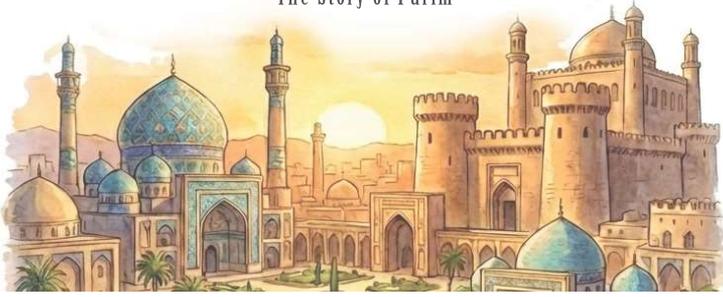
"*Bayamim haheim uMordechai yoshev besha'ar hamelech.*" Now it doesn't mean he was sitting in the gateway outside. It sounds like he was loafing on the street, leaning against the door of the palace. No! *Sha'ar hamelech* was the gate where the king's wise men sat. And the king wasn't that stupid just to limit them to one group of people. He had representatives of all the nations sitting in the great counsel outside of his palace. And the Jews were represented too. And "*Mordechai was sitting besha'ar hamelech*" means, in the *sha'ar hamishpat*. In the king's palace, in front, there was like a grandstand where the great men of the kingdom sat, and Mordechai was sitting there.

Now, as a result of the deposition of the queen, they had to seek a new queen. And therefore there started a big job of sampling, and Achashveirosh had to sample all the prospective queens. It wasn't just a beauty contest; each one had to come to him, and he was sampling them. As a result of that, there was no peace anymore in the palace. Every night was a *wedding* night in the palace! Like this, at nighttime at least the palace was quiet; the king retires and the servants have a chance to rest. But now every night a new bride came! So Bigson and Seresh, the king's chamberlains, were going crazy! And they said we have no more rest! And so they didn't see any way out! They said it's either we or him. Either *we'll* get rid of *him*, or *he'll* kill *us*! And therefore they decided to get rid of him, they decided to poison the king.

Mordechai was one of the old Sanhedrin. And to be on Sanhedrin, it was necessary to know the seventy languages; he knew *shivim lashon*. And Bigson and Seresh, they spoke in one of the rare languages of the empire. There was nobody around who knew their language. Of course they thought Mordechai the Jew, he *surely* wouldn't understand. And so they saw this Jew pass by, and they didn't guard themselves from him and they kept on talking. And Mordechai heard something, "...king...poison...night-cup..." and he finally discovered their secret. And Mordechai decided that it's his job to save the king's life.

"*Vatomer Esther lamelech beshem Mordechai*" – Esther told the king what Mordechai had said, in his name. Because Esther didn't try to win glory for herself that she saved the king's life, but she said it in the name of Mordechai, *kol*

*haomer davar beshem omro meivi geulah leolam* – she saved the world. So the king said “What do you mean? People are trying to poison me?! I’m such a good monarch to everybody!” But he sent people to investigate, and they took the wine he was supposed to drink, gave it to a monkey, and the monkey dropped dead on the spot! So the king took these two, and they executed them. But since Mordechai was the one who was the informant, so the king gave orders, “Write this in my books, in my chronicles.” It was inscribed in the chronicles of the king that Mordechai saved the king’s life. And the king gave orders that Mordechai should be able to hang around inside the palace. That’s all, nothing else was done to him. Mordechai was rewarded that it was written in the king’s records, and he was admitted into the palace. That’s what Josephus says.



## CHAPTER 3

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### **The Rise of Haman**

“*Achar hadevarim haeileh*,” after all this was prepared by Hashem – it means only *after* these things – “*gidal haMelech Achashveirosh es Haman*,” the King Achashveirosh exalted Haman. How did Haman come to be exalted? Haman was an extraordinary character. He was a Semite, *mi’zera Eisav*. He was an Amaleki. The Amalekim were destroyed mostly by Shaul Hamelech, and together with the Jews, they scattered *bechol medinos haMelech Achashveirosh*. In Shushan Habirah there was a *bigger* representation, but they were everywhere. Now the king was very desirous of making a link with all the provinces of his empire. And he met a certain Haman, an Amaleki, and Haman told him that he is going to help the king amalgamate, consolidate all the countries of the Persian Empire. And the king said “How will you do that?” And Haman said “My family, my nation, we don’t have any country anymore; we’re scattered everywhere. But we have all together a common blood tie, and I am the most important one. I come from the royal

family. I am Haman Ha'agagi, from Agag. (Agag was the last king of the Amalekim. He was executed by Shmuel Hanavi in the days of Shaul). I come from that king, and they all listen to me. And I have them as agents everywhere. (Remember, later we see that Haman's people, the Amalekim, were in every city). And they're going to help me in the great work of fortifying your control over all the provinces. They're all capable people, and together we're going to help you maintain your hold *meiHodu vead Kush.*"

So the king took this Haman into his confidence, and he began to give him more and more power. And Haman started delivering! It wasn't just empty talk. The king began seeing the effects of Haman's intrigues! In all the courts of the minor monarchs everywhere, they became more and more devoted to the central authority by means of Haman's liaison officers.

Remember, that was the main concern of the emperors: How can you keep together the black people in Ethiopia over here and the Hindus over there. They have a different religion, a different language and different races. You need to keep on the job all the time! And in that Haman was one of his big agents. And therefore Haman became especially beloved by the king. Haman became very powerful. He was very wealthy.

### ***Mordechai Will Not Bow***

And now the king decided to grant Haman especial privileges. And he issued a decree that *everybody must bow down to Haman*. That was a gift for Haman, in recognition

of his services. Now of course the king also had his own ulterior motives, because Haman would travel everywhere, and speak in the name of the king. And everybody would worship Haman, would give him the utmost reverence, and in that way the king sent an emissary – a plenipotentiary with full power everywhere – who would consolidate and keep together all the *medinos*.

So when Haman went out in the courtyard of the king where the king's privileged people were allowed to come, everybody fell on their faces before Haman, "*uMordechai lo yichra velo yeshtachaveh*" – Mordechai refused. And why did Mordechai refuse? That's a question. Some say because the king had given orders to worship Haman as a minor deity. In those days that was done. And naturally, Mordechai was a big *tzaddik* and a big *talmid chacham*, so he refused. Some say because Haman was an Amaleki, and a Jew didn't bow to an Amaleki. It was considered the expression of evil itself, the Amalekim. *Macho timcheh*, you should erase the Amalekim from the world – so how could a Jew bow down to an Amaleki? Whatever it was, he didn't bow down. And when Haman saw that Mordechai didn't bow down, so Haman now became so enraged that he decided that he's going to wipe out all the people of Mordechai. Because now, it was reminded to him the ancient hatred of his family, against those who had destroyed his nation.

### **Casting Lots**

"*Bachodesh harishon...Hipil pur hu hagorel lifnei Haman etc.*" – Haman threw lots. (The Persians used to throw dice among themselves to find an auspicious date). When Haman

threw lots, let's say it was superstition. I'm not saying it *was*; it could be *min hasShamayim* that day had been decreed, it's a day when Haman could carry out his plan. But whatever it was, Haman didn't choose the day of his own accord – he chose it by lot, that on that day he ought to carry out his plan. Now it's called Purim (“Lots” – in plural) *al shem hapur*, which means there are two meanings to that lot: Haman's interpretation was he's throwing lots for the most auspicious day, the day that will be most successful for him to carry out his plans. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu said “That date is auspicious for Me too. That's the date I want that the Jewish nation should sing forever, and dance and drink a little bit, and remember what happened on that day!” That's the meaning of Purim. What to the *rasha* was considered the day of opportunity, actually was the day of his undoing and it's the day of the success of the *tzaddik*.

### **Haman's Slander**

When Haman finally came to the king to make the request that the king should grant him his petition to destroy the Jews, Haman came with fatal words: “*yeshno am echad,*” there's one people – only one people – “*bechol medinos malchusecha,*” among all the provinces of your empire. You're trying to consolidate your empire and make everybody loyal to you, but there's one people that you'll never be able to win them over. “*Vedaseihem shonos mikol am,*” because their laws are different from those of every people. And if you'll make laws, and hope by means of these laws to be uniform in the government throughout all of your empire, you should know “*ve'es dasei hamelech einam osim,*”

they won't do the king's laws. Now, we have to understand this wasn't true. But Haman was explaining to the king as follows: "Look," he said, "If a fly would fall into a cup of wine, the Jew would take the fly out, and drink the wine! But if you, *the king*, the emperor, would *touch* that wine, they would refuse to drink it." The king said "What's that?! Is that true?" So the king sent and inquired! And they told him Jews don't *drink* wine touched by non-Jews. Would they drink wine if a dead fly fell in? Yes. Unless they're finicky, they'll take the dead fly out and drink the wine. So the king said something is *wrong* here. I see Haman is telling me the truth! What hope do I have of getting them to be my loyal servants – and that's my dream *day and night* – how I can keep together my empire! And therefore Haman slipped in the king's mind the idea, that he must destroy the people.

### **The King's Response**

Achashveirosh and Haman – they were both drunk you know; that's why we drink wine. We try to re-enact that scene, *b'mishteh hayayin*. Haman was not drunk enough, however, to not know what he *wanted*. So the drunken monarch of a hundred and twenty-seven *medinos* takes off his ring – the ring is the badge, the sign of *full authority* – and he puts it on the finger of the worst man in the world. Ah! The Gemara (Megillah 14a) says the removing of the ring from this drunkard's finger to that drunkard's finger was so great, it did more for us than forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses thrown in for good measure. Haman made us better than Moshe Rabbeinu and all the rest of the *tzaddikim* could make us.

And like we say in the Selichos on Ta'anis Esther, "K'teil v'charitz..." *Teil* means a mound and *charitz* is a ditch. And the Gemara (Megillah 14a) says, there were once two people: One owned a big pile of dirt in his backyard and he was looking to get rid of it. Another man had a big hole in his backyard and he was looking to fill it in. And one day these two gentlemen met at a café, and they're drinking wine together.

So one said "I have a trouble, I have a big pile of dirt in my backyard. What could I do with it?"

And the other one said "Give it to me."

So the first one said "I'll pay you for taking it," but the second one says, "No, I'll be grateful. I'll take it for nothing, I need it to fill in a hole in *my* backyard." And so when Haman requested of the king for permission to destroy all the Jews, and he offered ten thousand talents of silver, the king said "The money I give back to you, and do with the people like you desire." Achashveirosh was trying to get rid of the Jews, but he was looking for someone who'd do the dirty work for him, and now Haman came along and he wanted to *pay* for it! So the king was so happy that he found the right man. He said "*hakesef nasun lach*," "I'm giving you the money back. You can have them for nothing."

### **The Edict is Sent Out**

The nations all received letters telling them – it was Haman's job to inform them – that on this and this day they should all get up in the morning after eating a good breakfast, so they have a lot of *koach*, and each one should

take out, if he has axes or kitchen knives or whatever he has, and make a good job destroying all the Jews in his town. And everybody all over the world was preparing for that. Even nice people. If I would get a letter saying “On this and this day you have permission to kill as many people as you wish,” I would have to be locked in my house, I’m afraid! I wouldn’t trust myself!

But especially if the permission was to kill Jews! That’s the way it is, that Jews are not liked. There’s a reason for it. The Jew is different. You couldn’t meet a Jew in the places where other people met people. The Jew doesn’t mix with people in bars. Jews didn’t go to races. Jews didn’t go to celebrations of idols. Jews didn’t mix! That’s how it used to be. “*Hein am levadad yishkon,*” they’re a nation that dwells apart! “*Uvegoyim lo yischashav,*” it’s not considered among the nations. That’s what Bilam said. And Haman said the same thing! “*Yeshno am echad mefuzar umefurad bein ha’amim,*” they’re scattered among the peoples. But they’re *am echad*, they’re one people! Wherever they are, they’re one people! That’s not *drush*, that’s the plain meaning. “*Vedaseihem shonos mikol am,*” Haman said! “Their practices are different from all other nations!” Now what is Haman complaining? Does he mean to say that the Indians had the same practices as the people in Persia? The Indians and the Persians were as far apart as could be. But there was a *tzad hashaveh shebahem*, there was a common denominator! When it came to worshipping idols, they *all* did. This idol, that idol. When it came to sensuality, when it came to license, to lust, *hatzad hashaveh shebahem shedarkan lehazik!* They were all the same! But there was one nation

that “*daseihem shonos*,” they’re different. They’re entirely different.

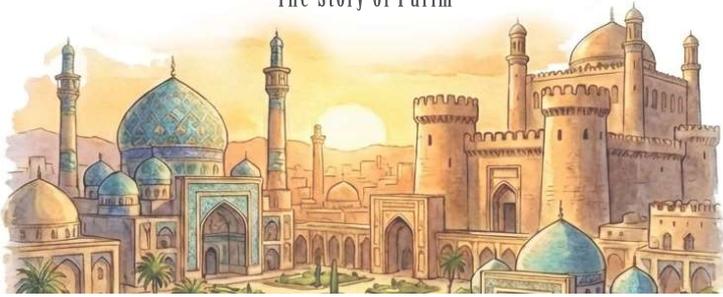
So naturally, low people didn’t like Jews. Better people of course, didn’t mind them. If a man passes you in a car while you’re walking on Bensonhurst Street and he shouts at you something, you understand he’s not a professor in a college. Most likely he’s a man who works for sanitation. Not public sanitation – that’s already too far for him. He works on top of a private sanitation truck. He’s a low character! You understand that.

And so when people got letters from the capital, that on this and this day everybody should be ready to slaughter Jews, it was a red-letter day for everybody! And I don’t want to say it, but I’m afraid that even the nice *goyim* said “Well, none of our business, but the king said so.” And they looked around to see if anything was handy; in case of necessity, they should have something handy too. Whatever it was, their appetites were whetted! Everyone was waiting for a good time on this and this day. And they knew they’d be in good with Haman. Haman had all the power, and the more they’re enthusiastic in this “*mitzvah*,” the more Haman would like them. They might even get a *letter* from him, praising them. And so there was rejoicing all over the empire. And the empire meant a hundred and twenty-seven *medinos*.

Wherever there were Jews, they were just sitting like rabbits in a cage, waiting until somebody would come and shoot them. There was no way out; you couldn’t defend yourself. It was all finished! Everybody was ready to die. We have to *picture* it. When we read about the *gezeirah*

· The Story of Purim ·

of Haman, that the Jews were sentenced to die, we know what's doing in the back pages, so we're not worried about it! But they didn't *know* what was doing in the back pages yet. You say they had trust? It's a little *hard* to have trust. When the king had taken off his ring, and he had given it to *the worst man in the world* – to Haman *tzorer haYehudim*, a man who *grew up* on Jew hatred. And now he has the *power of empire* in his hand, and he means business. Haman's not a man to retract, and the king can't take back his word! *Devar hamelech ein lehashiv!* So you had to be the biggest *tzaddik* in the world not to be afraid. Of course they thought, Hakadosh Baruch Hu won't let His people be destroyed. Maybe one Jew in Afghanistan will survive, a Jewish family, and from them again the Jewish nation will develop. But all of us? We're finished!



## CHAPTER 4

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### ***The Reason for the Gezeirah***

It says “U’Mordechai yoda es kol asher naasoh” – Mordechai knew all that was taking place. Only Mordechai knew? What does it mean, Mordechai knew? So the Chachamim (see Rashi) say he knew *why* it was taking place. He understood it was because they wanted to get close to the *goyim* at the *seudah* of Achashveirosh. He knew that, he understood it was all because of that, that the *gezeirah* was coming upon them. Therefore, when people know, and they call to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for help, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu demonstrates that He is the One Who does everything, and He gives a *mapalah* to our enemies.

### ***The Fast of Esther***

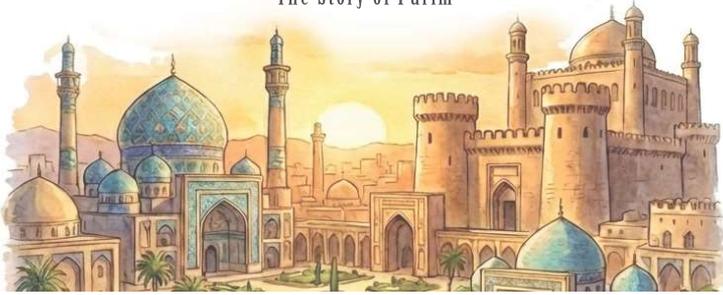
Mordechai sent a message to Esther, that she must go to the king and intercede for her people. And she said to him “Do you know what it means, I should go to the king? Because no one can come unless he’s called, and otherwise

it means probably to lose one's life." And he insisted, and he told her "If you won't do it, someone else will save the Jewish people." That's how the story is told. And she decided to go.

But in the *megillah*, one thing – a remarkable fact – is revealed to us. It was *Esther* who said "*lech kenos es kol haYehudim*." It was *Esther's* idea, not *Mordechai's*. That it says *openly* here. Before she went, she said to *Mordechai* "Call all the *Yehudim* together, and they should fast throughout all the Jewish communities, three days and three nights." An unusual decree to make, because many people wouldn't *survive*, it seems to us. For three times twenty-four hours not to eat or drink! But *Esther* made a drastic edict, and *Mordechai* seconded it, and the entire Jewish nation all over the empire of *Persia* began an unheard of ordeal. But not only they *fasted*. Some people would fast, let's say they sleep for three *m'eis l'eis*, and they get up emaciated but they rested. No! In these three days the Jewish nation was gathered together. Not in their *homes*. Three days they spent in congregations, wherever they were, day and night. And they were shouting themselves hoarse to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. That was *Esther's* plan. "*Lech kenos es kol haYehudim*," gather them together. "*Kenos*" is from the word *beis hakenesses*; everybody came together, wherever they were. They didn't budge from the *beis hakenesses* for twenty-four hours times three. And they were shouting. Of course, how can you shout for twenty-four hours? And three times twenty-four hours? So they were fainting! But they got up again. They certainly became hoarse, some lost their voices. But it's better than *dying*. And therefore this

unheard of ordeal continued one day and another day and another day. Because Esther said “Nothing doing. Nothing less than that!” It was a great strength of character! And it was her initiative. And Mordechai seconded it, and the Jewish people did it.

And that effected a change in the nature of the people that turned it upside down. The Jewish nation was *venahafoch hu*, they became turned upside down. They were always a good people, always excellent people – the best! Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself testifies. But now the best became better than before. *Venahafoch hu*, they were turned upside down by Esther’s edict. Esther herself *and all the girls* who served her! “*Gam ani vena’arosai atzum kein,*” they did the same! For three times twenty-four hours they all fasted. No eating in the nighttime, and no drinking either. “*Ve’al tochlu ve’al tishtu*” she said, don’t eat or drink. Don’t *think* you can drink. Try it for fun once in your life and see how it feels, for three days and three nights. Motzei Yom Kippur, another day, and another night, and another day and another night. If you’re still around, bring the report in here. And they did it. It was almost like the *gezeirah* of Haman! When they tottered out at the end of three days and three nights, they were skeletons! They were more dead than alive! But what difference does it make? You were going to die anyhow, so you might as well try.



## CHAPTER 5

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### ***Esther Goes to Achashveirosh***

Esther was risking her life, because Persia was a country of *law*. “*Dasei Paras uMadai*” is constantly repeated. They were *very strict* in enforcing all the laws, without exception. And to come to the king without invitation, was a *mortal peril*. The king had a multitude of wives. The fact that Esther would come in, would not guarantee that her life would be saved. And if the king was in a bad mood, he would just keep quiet and she would be executed on the spot. If he would not extend his scepter to her, she was lost. But *not only that*. It was not only *her* life. Esther was now coming to save the lives of the whole Klal Yisroel. That night when Esther had to come to Achashveirosh, she had been fasting for three days. She could hardly walk. Her maidservants were holding her up, so she shouldn’t fall down. And when you fast three days you’re not good looking. But she no longer relied on her looks. “From now on, forget about it. I can’t find favor with him anymore just with *gashmiyus*, just on the strength of my appearance. Right now it’s such a desperate thing

that Hashem has to step in and help us. We're not going to try and find favor with him at all; not to find *chein* in the eyes of the *goyim*!" And so she tottered in more dead than alive. She didn't have a *chance* to find favor in his eyes.

As she walked in through the outer court, the soldiers were standing with their swords unsheathed. They would have killed another person, but she was the queen; you couldn't kill the queen. They wanted to see what would happen, they were watching. And Achashveirosh, he wasn't such a good-natured fellow! A glum fellow, overfed. He was belching from his last meal, his stomach was hurting him from overeating! He was sitting on his throne, like this, waiting for the first chance he could get to sentence anybody who will stagger in to death. And she comes in. A *neis* took place, and the king extended his scepter and she touched his scepter. The king certainly was surprised! A person risked her life?! It must be a very important mission! Maybe she wanted, let's say, that he should give her a big estate, miles and miles of fields and gardens; he should build a palace for her. And so he said "*Ad chatzi hamalchus* – whatever you want I'll give you!"

He was surprised! He knew it was going to be a very big request. What does she do? She says "I want to invite you and Haman to a little feast." "That's all?!" the king said. The king wasn't a fool, and he thought there's something up her sleeve there. He began to be a little suspicious. She risked her life to invite him to a little party with Haman?! If she came to invite him to a big *banquet*, where all the nobility of the kingdom were present, *maybe*! But just for this?! And

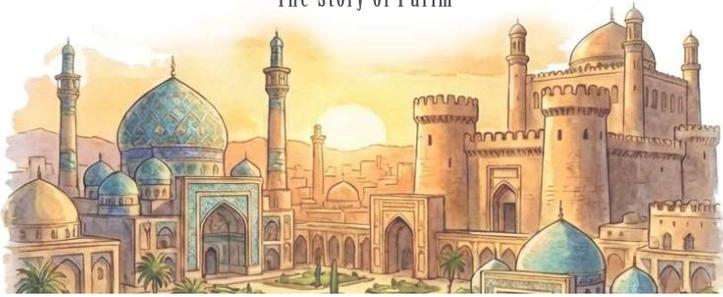
why only Haman? So he began to *think* about this. But he granted it. He was willing.

### **The First Party**

When Esther invited Haman and the king the first time, she wanted to see – at the first party – if the king would be somewhat cross with Haman. The king should think, “Look, my queen is throwing a party for me. Why did she call in this man too? Is he a *rival* with me? Who is he?!” And she thought *maybe*, the king would show a little irritation. Then it would be a good climate of irritation to accuse Haman. But things went smoothly! The king was drinking with Haman, they made a *l’chaim*, like good friends. So it was a lost opportunity. So she said “Next time. I’ll try it again.” When the king asked her “What do you want?” she said “Come once more.”

### **Haman Builds a Gallows**

Now, when Haman came from the *seudah*, he was full of happiness. He was walking on air. And suddenly his balloon burst! Because he encountered Mordechai, and Mordechai “*lo kam velo za*,” he didn’t get up. That hurt him to no end. Here, everybody is honoring me! The king, and even the queen! And nobody else was called to the party except myself! And Mordechai Hayehudi doesn’t show me the slightest recognition, “*lo kam velo za*,” he didn’t even move! So therefore, he became full of wrath, and he decided to destroy Mordechai. So what did Haman do? He went and he built a huge gallows; a big post with a yardarm, on which he would hang Mordechai.



## CHAPTER 6

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### *The Sleepless Night*

On that night, the king couldn't sleep. Now, the king had no reason to suffer from insomnia. This kind of king, every night, fell asleep like a butchered ox! He indulged in *everything*. And every night when he laid on his couch, he immediately went into slumber land. You couldn't wake him up unless you stuck knives into him. And "*balaylah hahu nadidah shnas hamelech*," that night he couldn't sleep! It was a miracle! A lot of miracles happened that night. Because that night was the night chosen by Haman, to petition for the life of Mordechai. After all, Mordechai wasn't a nobody! He was *yoshev besha'ar hamelech*, an important man in the kingdom! And Haman needed *permission* to destroy him. And he came there while it was still night, because he wanted to be the first one in the morning to catch the king. '*Zerizin makdimin*'!

Now the king couldn't sleep all night. It's a remarkable thing! And so the king began to think: What's the matter?

Why am I so restless? And he began to think about reasons he has to be concerned. What is there that I have to worry about? Now, he already knew that there had once been a plot to destroy him by his two servants. So he was thinking, maybe this is a premonition, a message from heaven that something is going to happen to me. And maybe I'd better get busy now looking into my affairs! But then why is it that when the time came to warn me against that plot, it had to be a Jew? Don't I have Persian subjects, loyal people who are closer to me than Mordechai? And what's this business, that Esther my queen is inviting this fellow Haman and me and *nobody else* to a wine feast? That's a queer business! Maybe they're in collusion! Esther and Haman are going to put something into my wine, and that's how they'll get rid of me! And then they'll marry, and they'll take over the kingdom! So he said, is there nobody with whom I can take counsel? There's nobody that's loyal to me? Nobody loves me? Then he began thinking, maybe it's my own fault! Did I ever reward anybody who did anything for me? Let me look back on my career! Does it pay for people to stick their necks out to help me out? What did I reward them? So he said "Bring to me the chronicles of my kingdom." So they were brought.

Now the fellow who brought them was a *very bitter enemy* of the Jewish people (see Megilah 16a). And as he began turning the pages to find something interesting for the king to read – the king didn't want to read about taxes and about wars with the other nations; He wanted to hear about his private affairs. But how much of the private affairs of the king are inscribed in the chronicles? So this scribe

began turning pages, and he saw an interesting point, but he decided it's better to turn over the page, where Mordechai saved the king's life. He didn't want that to be read, so he skipped it over.

Now the king could have not noticed that! But Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the king a sharp eye at that moment, and he said "What's this? What are you skipping so fast? Turn back! Let's see, what's on this page that you skipped?!"

He said, "Ehh, I'll take a look."

So the king said "Never mind! What's there? What is written there?"

So he said, "There was a fellow named Mordechai."

"What about him?"

"And there was a plot."

"What was the plot?"

"To poison the king."

"Oh," the king said, "let's hear the story now! Refresh all the details in my memory!"

And he said "Well, there were two people who plotted against you. They wanted to put poison into your wine, and this Mordechai was the one who informed you about it. That's all."

The king said "That's all?! Was there anything else done to Mordechai? Anything done to him?"

He said "*Lo na'aseh davar* – nothing was done. It's not written in here."

So the king began thinking: If that's the way I reward those who save my life, no *wonder* I have nobody to let me know of impending danger. So I'd better start turning the wheel backwards! And the first thing is, I'm going to call in Mordechai and make an *example* of him. Let the world see, that Achashveirosh knows how to pay back for services rendered! Then, immediately the king was full of ambition to carry that out.

So the king started thinking, what shall I do? At that moment "*vayavo Haman,*" Haman came! Ah! *Min haShamayim* it was measured at that moment. Haman just came in. It was still *nighttime*; Haman couldn't wait until the morning because he had already erected a big pole to hang Mordechai so he was raring to go! He had the 'holy' fire of *Gehinom* burning in his heart! So he came. "*Vayashkem Avraham baboker*"! Haman got up early in the morning to do a "*mitzvah*"! So the king said "*Mi bachatzer* – who is there waiting? Anybody of my courtiers waiting?"

They said "*Haman is there.*"

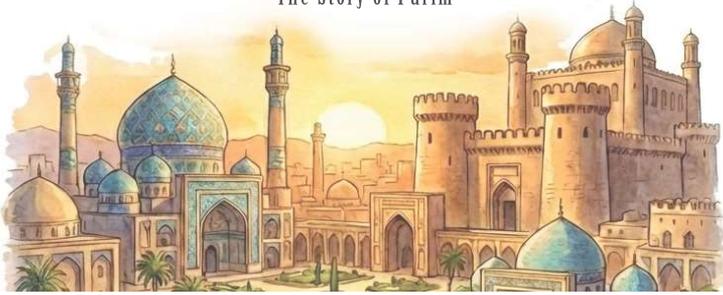
*Vayomer hamelech yavo* – The king said "Let him come in." And Haman walked in. So the king said "What should I do to a man who did great things for me and I *want to show my love for him*? What can I do?" So Haman said "that means me!" In his *mind*, he said "it means me!" And Haman said he should ride on the king's horse, and wear the king's crown, and they should make announcements before him as he goes through the streets, and so on and so forth.

### **The Parade**

That's how the end was, the next day, we see Haman parading through the streets, pulling the horse on which Mordechai is mounted with royal honors. And Haman has to shout, because it's the king's orders: "*Kachah ye'aseh le'ish,*" that's what is done to a man, "*asher hamelech chafetz beyekaro,*" that the king wants to honor him! Now things began turning upside down. Mordechai was one of those who was sentenced to die soon, and Haman was the one who should be riding on the king's horse – he was riding on "the high horse" the whole time – and all of a sudden they couldn't believe their eyes! The Jews who are waiting for death look through the windows. What's this? Who is there?! Haman is leading a horse? Is the king on the horse? No. Who is on the horse? *Mordechai Hayehudi is on the horse!* The world turned upside down. And now the Jews began seeing that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was in charge of the world. If Haman could be leading a horse on which his deadly enemy – not just a Jew, but *Mordechai Hayehudi!* The Jew, the most *hated* one, the one who refused to bow down to him – if *he's* sitting on the horse, then things turned upside down, "*venahafoch hu.*" That was the beginning of Haman's downfall.

When Haman's daughter saw the king's horse being led in the street, she looked down and saw two people, and she thought, "Who is sitting on the king's horse? It's my father! Who is leading the horse? It must be his worst enemy! So she took the chamber pot and emptied it over the head of the man who was leading the horse! So when Haman came back "*aveil vachafui rosh,*" the Gemara says he came back "*chafui*

rosh,” meaning his head was covered! But that’s getting off easy in this world. In the Next World they will cover him with coals! Burning coals are worse than a chamber pot. If we hadn’t had this picture, we wouldn’t know. In the Next World Haman is always sitting or walking and leading the horse on which the *tzaddikim* are riding, and there are hot coals, burning coals on his head. We have to understand that. In the *megillah*, we are given a taste, we are given a look into the Next World.



# CHAPTER 7

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## **The Second Party**

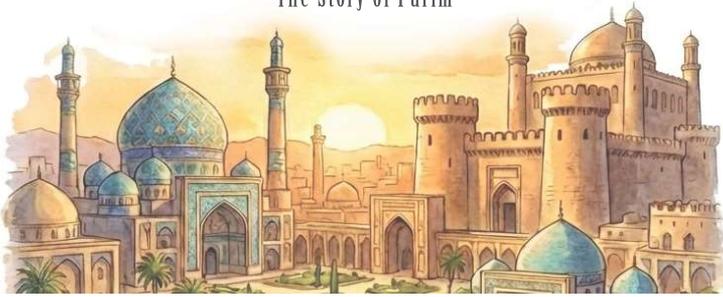
And finally, Haman came unprepared to the party; he was just ready for a good time. And at that party the queen got up and pointed a finger at him. The king said “Who is this wicked man you’re talking about, who wants to take your life and the life of your people?” And Esther said “*ish tzar ve’oyev*,” an enemy, “*Haman hara hazeh*” – she pointed a finger – and caught the king by surprise, and she said “This is the man who wants to kill my people.” The king was very much disturbed, because Haman was an *important man* to him. He was looking forward to the great day when Haman would carry out what he *also* wanted with all his heart. He didn’t know what to do! “*V’hamelech kam bachamaso*” – Achashveirosh went out to the garden, etc.

## **Haman’s Downfall**

Now if Haman hadn’t fallen on Esther’s bed to plead for his life, if he would have stood like a respectable humble

man, then the king would have come back and *forgiven* him! When the king came back in his anger, and he saw Haman lying on Esther's *bed*, that was already a big arrogance for a man who had the death sentence on him. He shouldn't even *approach* the queen, much less come on her *bed*! And therefore the king was *especially incensed* against him.

At that moment, he could have softened, he could have yielded! But just then, Eliyahu Hanavi was standing there in the form of Charvonah. "*Vayomer Charvonah echad min hasarisim,*" and Charvonah, one of the king's chamberlains, said. He *looked* like Charvonah, but it was too good a role for a *goy* to play. So Eliyahu pushed Charvonah into a closet! He said go to the bathroom for a little while. Charvonah was sitting in the *bathroom* all this time! So Eliyahu took on the habiliments and the appearance of Charvonah and he said the following great words: "*Vegam hinei ha'eitz asher asah Haman leMordechai asher diber tov al hamelech.*" Charvonah saved the day! He actually saved the day! He said "Look through the window, O king. You see that big gallows? That's what Haman made to kill the man who saved your life!" "Aha!" said the king, "*Teluhu alav!*" Hang him on it! *Hang him on it!*" And then the world was turned upside down, and Haman was hanging, and Mordechai was in the house of Haman!



## CHAPTER 8

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### **Joyous News**

And now all of a sudden a thunderbolt comes from Shushan Habirah, and it cracks all the peoples of the world on their head! What's the news? The letter says, Haman is dead! That was a knockout! Haman is hanging from the gallows! And who is in his place? That's the next question they ask – maybe it's a worse one than Haman? They say it's a Jew. A Jew?! *Mordechai the Jew* is in his place! It was a bigger thunderbolt! They got *two* thunderbolts in their head.

You know, when Mordechai put a great crown of gold on his head – the king put a crown on him, and a royal cloak on him with a royal girdle, and he went out in the streets of the city with footmen, and everybody was announcing “Here comes the second-in-command in the Persian Empire!” – you know what that meant? Do you have an idea what took place there? If they didn't have heart attacks from *simcha*, it was a miracle! Their blood pressure soared! They went crazy! *Everybody* went crazy! The whole city was crazy!

“*vha’ir Shushan tzahalal vesameichah!*” They went wild. The whole nation went wild with enthusiasm! And *all over the world* wherever Jews dwelled, they went wild when they heard what happened.

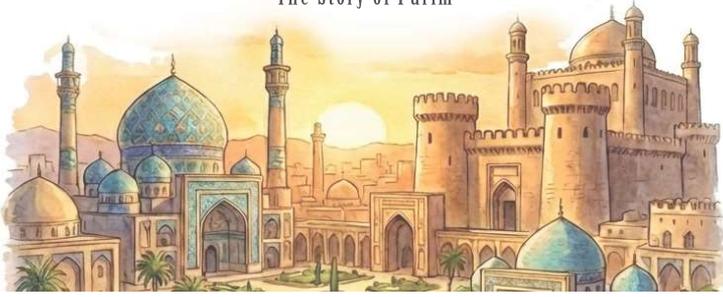
Suppose let’s say the Satmerer Rov was called in by the President, and the President said “I need somebody to handle the affairs of this nation. I’m too busy; I have to take care of my ranch, and I have to go bowling. So I need somebody to handle it. There are a lot of problems today! Recession, and crime...” He calls in let’s say R’ Yaakov Kamenetzky, some *gadol*, and he’ll take over. You understand how probable that is. It was *unthinkable!* It was a miracle. When they saw this great Torah sage walking out with a purple garment of royalty, and a great royal turban on his head, it made a terrific impression! Imagine R’ Moshe Feinstein is riding down Pennsylvania Avenue, with a military escort, and on both sides they’re shooting volleys in the air. People will start thinking, maybe there is something in Judaism! And that was the plan of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

“*LaYehudim haysah orah vesimchah,*” – now for the Yehudim it became light and joy, *vesason*, and gaiety, *veyakar*, and glory. And the Gemara explains *orah zu Torah*. From now on when a Jew sat down to learn, he sat with a light, with a happiness, with a joy that was caused by these two seasons, a great season of terror followed by a season of delirious happiness and that left such an eradicable and indelible impression on them that when they learned Torah their hearts were brimming with happiness. They learned Torah with *simchah*, with *orah*. When they were celebrating Yomtov, it was a different Yomtov than before. It was a new

kind of Yomtov with a greater happiness. When they made a *bris milah*, it was a different kind of celebration than ever before. Everything now was with happiness. Everything now was with a *seudah*. Everything now was with the great *simchah* of the deliverance.

### **Reaction of the Gentiles**

“*V’rabim meinamei ha’aretz misyahadim!*” The gentiles said “*mazel tov*” to the Jews! He said “You’re also a Jew?!” “Yeah, I’m a Jew,” he said! *Misyahadim!* Everybody acted like Jews! “*Ki nafal pachad haYehudim aleihem!*” Nobody wanted to be suspected, that he had a knife stored up in his home waiting for that great day. Nobody wanted to be suspected! They wanted to clear themselves of suspicion! “*V’rabim meinamei ha’aretz misyahadim!*” It doesn’t mean they became Jews. They were acting like Jews.



## CHAPTER 9

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### *An Upside-down World*

What the Jews thought would come upon them, came upon their enemies. “*Venahafoch hu*,” the *megillah* says, it was an upside down world! That’s what “*venahafoch hu*” means, an upside down world. A topsy-turvy world!

Instead of all the wealth Haman possessed, who owns that wealth now? Esther gave Mordechai all the wealth of Haman. Now Mordechai walks into Haman’s palace, “It’s all mine,” and now Zeresh (Haman’s wife) is washing dishes in the palace! Everything is upside down! It’s *v’nahapoch hu*!

Everybody knows that (Gittin 56b) *kol hameitzar leYisroel na’aseh rosh*, all the anti-Semites are always on top. The Jews, they have to be on the *bottom*! All of a sudden it was upside down. Haman was “on top” – but the wrong kind of a top! And Mordechai was on the right kind of a top! Mordechai has the king’s ring! *The best man in the world* has the king’s ring! *The worst man in the world* had it until now,

and now the *best* man in the world has it! The man who will do everything for his people.

### ***Killing Our Enemies***

Achashveirosh was prevailed upon to let the Jews defend themselves. On that day, when they were given permission to defend themselves, they didn't wait to be attacked – they started defending themselves! They did it with *relish*! Oh, did they defend themselves! They searched out every anti-Semite in the city! In those days the Jews weren't weaklings like today. All the Jews carried knives like *goyim* did. In those days everybody carried a knife. And the Jews went – like the Gemara says *haba lehorgecha*, if somebody comes to kill you, *hashkem alav lehorgo*, get up early in the morning to kill him first! They didn't *wait*! So the Jews got up early in the morning, *davened* very early at the first *minyan*, and each one sharpened his butcher knife and they had a big list, all the anti-Semites in the town. That's what they did! "*Venahafoch hu*," in every city the Jews were *killing their enemies*! Ah, was that fun! It's a lot of *fun* to kill your enemies – the enemies who wanted to kill you. And the *goyim* couldn't do a *thing*, because now Mordechai is the boss! And the Jews did a good job. Just think about that. In all the *medinos hamelech*, they killed.

Do you think Achashveirosh was happy? He said "*uvesha'ar medinos hamelech mah asu*?" You see it was a *milsa detmiah*! The king wasn't so *happy* that they killed gentiles. He said what *else* do you want of me? They said we want to hang up the sons of Haman. That's all we want! It *hurt* the king. It *hurt* him. Had he had the opportunity

now, he would have taken Haman *back* again! It was too late because Haman was dead already. But he couldn't refuse, so they hung up Haman's sons too.

### **A New Kabolos HaTorah**

At that moment, the Am Yisroel "entered Gan Eiden." They were so crazy, they were so delirious, it was really a danger to their lives. The Gemara says it was like Matan Torah. Their souls almost shot out of their bodies.

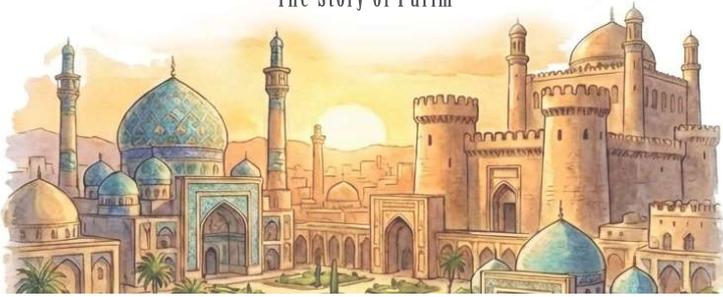
"*Kimu vekiblu haYehudim!*" This time they certified what they had once accepted! They went so wild that they said: now, whatever Hakadosh Baruch Hu asks us, we'll dive into *fire* for Him! Even *worse* than fire! And their last reservation melted away. Every bit of reservation was knocked out of their heads. If today we're still around...It's *hard* to be a Jew; we live among *goyim*, we're persecuted. We're still around, however. We're still here! Everywhere, Jews are reading the *megillah*! And they'll read until the end of time, like it says: "*Veyemei haPurim haeileh lo ya'avoru mitoch haYehudim,*" Purim will never go lost from the Jews! "*Vezichram lo yasuf mizaram,*" and their memory will never stop from their seed! Purim will be forever! Because there will always be Jews around to celebrate Purim.

(By the way, it's a good argument against our imitators, the gentiles, who try to imitate us and say *they're* the real Israelites. So we say to them, but it states here that the days of Purim will never depart from the Jews. Are you celebrating Purim? You claim to be the real Israelites, we say to the pope. (The pope says he's Israel. He says we're

not Israel anymore). So we open up the Bible – it says the days of Purim will never depart from the Jews. It means forever and ever the Jews will celebrate Purim. Do you read the *megillah* in the Vatican? It's a good argument! It means *we're* the ones! So *we're* the ones who are heirs of the Jewish people, not you).

And so, they accepted the Torah all over again. That's what happened. And this time they did it, that they filled their whole *neshamah*, their whole mind even all the way to the back, and they pushed that reservation out. There was no space left. There was so much gratitude in them, that they accepted the Torah now *completely*. This was the final *kabalas haTorah*.

To this day we cannot forget that happiness that they experienced in Shushan Habirah, and which we try to relive when we celebrate our Purims today.



# CHAPTER 10

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## **Conclusion**

At the end of the *megillah* we read, “And Achashveirosh put a tax upon the land and the islands of the sea; and all the deeds of his might and power etc.” These words, inserted to accord honor to the Persian government, were necessary to demonstrate that the *megillah* does not deal solely with the triumph of the Jews. This demonstrates clearly that the *megillah* – begun by Mordechai – was completed in the early days of the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah, when Persia was still powerful and all the Jews were still its subjects.

The time period during which the story of Purim took place is most significant. The Gemara says (Sanhedrin 21b), *ra’ui hayah Ezra shetinasein Torah al yado l’Yisroel* – Ezra was fitting that the Torah should be given through him. Before Ezra, you didn’t have to *daven* Shachris, Minchah and Maariv. You didn’t have to make a *brachah* – *Borei pri ha’eitz*, *Hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz*. All kinds of *muktzah* were *mutar*. Ezra came along, with the Anshei Knesses

Hagedolah, and made a whole list of *takonas chachomim*. He changed the entire *tzurah* of being a Jew. Ezra changed everything because he saw we're now in *galus*, and you have to make a *siyag laTorah* – otherwise who knows what's going to happen to us – and he made fences around the Torah. So Ezra actually came with a “new Torah.” It wasn't actually new; it's *assur* to be *mosif*. It's a *d'rabanan*. He said all this is *d'rabanan*, but it's a fence; it's in order to protect the Torah.

Now, how can you get the Klal Yisroel to accept that? You think it's easy?! It's a tremendous change! How did Ezra succeed? Purim came along, and “*kimu v'kiblu*” – at that time they accepted that. Not only did they accept the “old Torah” again; they accepted it with such a willingness, that took now all the *takanos* of Ezra and were *mekayeim* them. So on Purim, the *takanos* of Ezra were finally given the *chizzuk*, that they remained with the Klal Yisroel. A tremendous achievement! Absolutely, we celebrate that – no question about it.

But you should know, that that's only *agav urcha*. It's not the plain *pshat* in “*Kibu v'kiblu*,” that they were *mekabel* to be *mekayeim* the Torah. That's a good *drash*, and it's true! But it's not the original *pshat*. The most important lesson of Purim is something else: That Hakadosh Baruch Hu is *ohev amo Yisroel*. That's the main lesson of Purim. Of course as a result we're more loyal to Him; we're *mekabel* of course to do everything now, because He saved us. But the great lesson of Purim is just that. A lesson, that we have to love Am Yisroel like Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves the Am Yisroel. He made a demonstration on Purim, and on Purim that's

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the time when we have to start on our own to fulfill what Hakadosh Baruch Hu showed as an example, by means of the *neis* of Purim.

***Ah Freilich'en Purim!***