

WOMEN

Personalities
in the
Rebbe's Torah

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לע"נ מרת רבקה ח' הינדא
בת הרה"ת ר' אשר הלוי ע"ה
ברבר
גלב"ע י"ט אדר שני ה'תשע"ד
תנ"צ'ב'ה

נדפס ע"י בתה וחתנה
הרה"ת ר' לוי יצחק
וזוגתו מרת שפרינצא פערל
ומשפחתם שיחיו
שמוטקין

Esther Hamalkah

Esther Hamalkah was one of the greatest Jewish women who ever lived and one of our nation's most remarkable role models. She is counted among the *Nevios* and celebrated as one of the four most beautiful women in history. Esther is also the only woman in our history to have ruled (together with her husband) over the entire world.

Born as Hadassah, the daughter of Avichail, who hailed from the illustrious lineage of Shaul Hamelech and the tribe of Binyamin, Esther came into the world either 45, 75, or 85 years before the Purim story¹. Tragically, Esther's father had passed away before her birth, and her mother had perished during childbirth, leaving her an orphan. She was lovingly taken in by her cousin, the great Tzaddik Mordechai, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin and a man of influence at the royal palace.

Esther was nurtured in the household of Mordechai, where she received an exceptional *chinuch* from this great Tzaddik. Over time, Mordechai and Esther's bond deepened, and they eventually married. The Rebbe points out that Esther's unwavering commitment, her *mesiras nefesh* (as discussed below), came from the Chassidish *chinuch* she received in Mordechai's home. The Rebbe proves that Mordechai was a Chossid and that his house was permeated with Chassidus and *mesiras nefesh* from the fact that Mordechai instituted the obligation of "*Ad D'lo Yoda*", something that exhibits going above and beyond one's boundaries and limitations.²

There is a *machlokes* in Gemara whether her name was

really Hadassah, and Esther was an added name or vice versa. The Gemara explains that ‘Hadassah’ portrays her *tzidkus* as Tzaddikim are likened to *Hadasim*, while ‘Esther’ is from the Persian word *Istahar* (moon), as well as denoting “*hester*” (concealment). As we know from the Megillah, she concealed her true identity, not telling anyone of her true origin.

In another Gemara, Esther is connected with the *possuk* “*V’Anochi haster astir*,” the concealment of Hashem. This reflects the nature of the Purim miracle which was concealed in nature.³ Chassidus expounds on the Esther–Hester connection, highlighting Esther’s unique role in illuminating the darkness and mundanity that surrounded her.

Esther in the Palace

In about the year 3399 (366 B.C.E) the Persian king Achashverosh hosted a lavish banquet to showcase his might and renown. He invited all the inhabitants of his capital city Shushan, including the Jewish community. While the Jewish attendees refrained from consuming non-Kosher food, they made a significant error by showing excessive deference and admiration for the wicked Achashverosh, particularly as he would later remove and desecrate the sacred vessels from the Beis Hamikdash during this event.

The unfolding of the Purim narrative would reveal a profound connection between Hashem and the Jewish people. Yet, the beginning and the origin of the *gezeirah* was at this feast.

Hashem, who always formulates the remedy before the ailment, had already set the stage for Esther’s ascent even before the rise of Haman.

On the seventh day of the grand party, Achashverosh summoned his wife, Queen Vashti, in a demeaning manner, to appear before his guests. Vashti, a wicked and abusive woman in her own right, was afflicted with unflattering visual defects, and refused to appear before the king. After consulting with Haman, Achashverosh had her executed.

Achashverosh now began looking for a new wife. Women and girls were gathered from across his vast kingdom and brought to Shushan where they would meet the king.

Esther had no desire to be involved with Achashverosh or the palace and attempted to remain inconspicuous. Despite her efforts, she was eventually discovered and taken to the king’s palace for preparations. Before her departure, Mordechai instructed her to conceal her Jewish identity.

Esther quickly won the affection and admiration of everyone in the palace, and her concealed identity led each nationality to claim her as one of their own. While Esther refrained from participating in the treatments and adornments like the other women, Heigai, the minister in charge, expedited her preparations, providing only what he deemed absolutely necessary.

In the month of Teves, Esther was presented to the king, and Achashverosh chose her to be his new queen. He tried manipulating Esther into revealing her identity, yet Esther steadfastly followed the words of Mordechai.

Various Gemaros and Mefarshim offer explanations concerning the Halachic aspects of her marriage to Achashverosh and its implications for her relationship with Mordechai.⁴

Even while keeping her Jewish heritage hidden, Esther



MAUSOLEUM IN THE CITY OF HAMADAN, WHICH ACCORDING TO A TRADITION OF IRANIAN JEWS GOING BACK AT LEAST 1000 YEARS, IS THE RESTING PLACE OF MORDECHAI AND ESTHER.

made sure to keep Yiddishkeit - maintaining a vegetarian diet and observing Shabbos with help from a rotation of maidservants. As the Megillah says “*Ves maamar Mordechai Esther oisah*” [and the words of Mordechai, Esther does] – even during her time in the palace, Esther kept true to the *chinuch* she received from Mordechai.

The Rebbe explained that this is one of the reasons the Megillah is named after Esther. She was quite literally queen of the world, and following “*dina demalchusa dina*” [the rule that one must follow the laws of the land] Mordechai should have been following Esther. Nevertheless, Esther kept her great respect for Mordechai Hatzadik - heeding his instructions and adhering to his path just as she did back at home. It was this *bittul* that ultimately saved the Jewish people, and serves as a lesson for all time.⁵

Esther's Response

As the Purim story continued to unfold, Haman rose to power, Mordechai stood strong as a proud Jew, and Haman, along with Achashverosh decreed to have the entire Jewish nation annihilated on the 13th of Adar.

Mordechai, clad in sackcloth and ashes, lamented and called out bitterly to Hashem over the terrible decree that had been proclaimed around the world. He reached the palace gate and stayed right outside, not too far from the queen. When Esther was notified of Mordechai's state, Esther sent messengers with fresh clothes for Mordechai and made sure to find out what exactly happened.

When Esther understood that there was a decree against her people, “*Vatischalchal hamalka me'od*” – she was terrified and agitated. The *gezeirah* shook her on a personal level even though she herself was not in danger. This deep care for her people compelled her to behave with immense self-sacrifice.⁶

The Megillah recounts the back-and-forth between Mordechai and Esther. Esther brought up her concerns about entering the king's chamber uninvited, an act punishable by death. Mordechai reminded her of her unique situation and the great responsibility and merit she had to save her people. Esther resolved to step up and do her part.

While Esther lived in the palace and could have heard about the decree some other way, it was necessary for her to hear it directly from Mordechai, and receive his guidance about how to proceed. While she played the role that did what was necessary in the physical world, she needed to be led by the spiritual, represented by Mordechai – the *tzaddik*

and *nossi hador*.⁷

Although she would have been safe in the palace, Esther's immense *ahavas Yisroel* did not allow her to remain silent. She went beyond the letter of the law. A rav would have *paskened* that she should not endanger her life by going to the king, but Esther did not ask; she went ahead with *mesiras nefesh*.⁸

Once Esther decided to go to the king, she told Mordechai what needed to be done beforehand: “Go gather all the Jews in Shushan, and fast for three days and nights.” Esther added, “My maidservants and I will fast as well.” Then, she would go to the king's chambers, and plead before him for her people.

With her *binah yeseira*,⁹ Esther knew that the response to the terrible decree needed to be of a spiritual kind. She knew that it wasn't Haman and Achashverosh who wielded the power - only Hashem could save His children. Therefore, the focus would be on the spiritual front.

As someone who lived with the challenges of worldly and materialistic pleasures in the king's palace, Esther understood its allure, and knew how the Jews could be brought to *teshuva*.

Esther countered their indulgence and materialism with abstinence. She sought to prove that, for the sake of Hashem's salvation, all the Jews would deprive themselves from even the most basic and necessary physical pleasures – i.e. food and drink.¹⁰

Mordechai was on too lofty a level to appreciate the challenge. He wouldn't have necessarily included the Jews who went to Achashverosh's party in the three-day fast. On the other hand, Esther (from the word *hester* - concealment), whose mission was to work with the darkness of the world,



BASED ON THE DETAILED RUINS OF THE PALACE IN SHUSHAN (KNOWN AS THE OLD CITY OF SUSA TODAY), ARCHAEOLOGISTS WERE ABLE TO GENERATE THIS COMPLETE RENDITION. THE THRONE ROOM IS RIGHT IN THE CENTER.

knew to include them. She told Mordechai “*Kenos es kol hayehudim*” [“Gather all the Jews”] calling on Mordechai to involve all Jews in the process of *teshuva*.¹¹

In the spirit of her *mesiras nefesh*, and knowing that the *gezeirah* was in essence from on high, Esther included herself in the three day fast. This only heightened the danger of her going to Achashverosh, and even worked against what she was trying to accomplish. Nevertheless, Esther did the inconceivable and went to Achashverosh in a weak and frail state, after three days of fasting.

With the words “*ka'asher avadti avadti*” [“and if I perish, I perish”], Esther alluded to an even deeper sacrifice. By going willingly to Achashverosh, she was not only putting her physical life in danger, but on a spiritual level, she was putting her *neshama* and marital status in peril as well.

Even as queen of the world, surrounded by all the power, riches, and self-indulgence the universe had to offer, and even while deprived of any spiritual inspiration, Esther put her physical and spiritual life on the line to save her people. This *mesiras nefesh* is a clear expression of the *neshama*'s essence – *Etzem* – which is incomparable to even the loftiest of spiritual revelations.¹²

Esther and the Miracle

After three days of fasting, Esther approached the king's chambers. Miraculously the king was overjoyed to see his queen, though he had not summoned her. Esther asked the king if he would join Haman and herself for a feast of wine, and Achashverosh agreed.

The first feast led to a second. At the second feast, after Mordechai had begun his rise and Haman his downfall, Esther spoke out for her people, and pointed an accusing finger at Haman, who was swiftly dealt with.

It is interesting to note that Esther did all this on her own. From the time Esther went to the king's chambers until after Haman's demise, we see no interaction between her and Mordechai.

Chassidus explains that as “*Akeres Habayis*”, Esther knew exactly what to do on her own. “*Batach bah leiv baalah*” [Her husband's heart trusts her] – Mordechai knew that she would be able to take care of Haman without his intervention.¹³

With Haman gone, Mordechai was appointed as viceroy. He issued a decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves and retaliate against their enemies on the 13th of Adar, the day originally designated for the enemies of the Jews to carry

out their massacre.

As the 13th of Adar approached, the entire Jewish nation mobilized for the impending battle. Men and women of all ages prepared to fight for their lives, with the exception of Esther. Protected within the confines of the palace, she had no means of participating in the physical combat. Consequently, she was the only one permitted to observe a fast.

On that fateful day in Adar, Esther spent her time praying and fasting, calling out to Hashem and begging for His mercy and kindness. This, of course, is one of the reasons for Taanis Esther.¹⁴

The Megillah of Esther

There are two crowning figures in the Purim story – Mordechai and Esther, yet the Megillah is named after Esther alone. The basic reason, mentioned in the Gemara, is that Esther wrote to the Chachomim and insisted that the story be included in Tanach. Because she worked to have it preserved, it is named after her.

Based on various Gemaros in Bavli and Yerushalmi, the Rebbe explains that there were three steps: 1) Mordechai and Esther requested of the Chachomim that they institute the Yom Tov of Purim. 2) Esther requested that they establish the reading of the Megillah as part of the Yom Tov. And 3) Esther asked that the Megillah be included in Tanach and remain for the following generations.

Esther represents the “*Guf*” and the concealed state in which we find ourselves, and she also brings to the front our response and our *avodah* in this darkness – permeating it with G-dliness and *kedusha*. As we see in the story, while Mordechai was gathering children to learn Torah, Esther was planning parties and meeting kings and dignitaries. Mordechai was responsible for the spiritual remedy – saving the Jewish souls, while Esther was responsible for saving the Jewish people – physically.

In that vein, Esther felt that the story of the Megillah should not just be told and celebrated, it needed to be written down – ink on parchment, cementing the lessons of the Megillah as part of the foundations of Yiddishkeit.¹⁵

The Megillah being named after her also highlights her unique part in the Purim story, even more than Mordechai's.

Esther (from the world *hester*) understood and dealt with *galus* in a real way, as opposed to Mordechai who on a basic level really didn't relate to the *galus* and its challenges. For this reason Esther was instrumental in bringing around the

necessary “*tikkun*” for the generation, and merited to have her name on the Megillah, conserving her story and conveying her message to women and men for all time.¹⁶

The Rebbe adds another reason that the Megillah was named after Esther: to serve as an example for women of all ages, to teach them the power of their *mesiras nefesh* and how much they can impact the world for good.

This is the reason Esther was determined to have the Megillah written. She wanted women to learn from her example about the importance of *mesiras nefesh*.¹⁷

The Rebbe goes even further: the fact that the miracle of Purim played out through the practical actions of Esther and not another way, is to teach us that everything is dependent on the *mesiras nefesh* of women.¹⁸

Esther in Chassidus

As mentioned, Esther symbolizes *hester* - concealment. The Gemara asks “*Esther min haTorah minayin?*” [What is the source for Esther in the Torah?] and responds with the *possuk* “*VeAnochi haster astir ponai bayom hahu*” [and conceal, I will conceal my countenance on that day]. The Baal Shem Tov explains that the two-fold concealment mentioned in the *possuk* refers to a double darkness, where one doesn’t even realize that they are in the dark.

Both in her life and in the role she played, Esther interacted with the dark side of reality. The Megillah is the response to *galus*. Its message and example teach us that in concealment

itself we can find the most powerful light.

In Chassidus, Esther is also associated with the *Sefira* of *Malchus*, particularly as it descends to function in the lower worlds, embodied in vessels (*Keilim*). However, Esther possesses the power to elevate and reveal the inherent light in the darkest of circumstances, both through the influence of Mordechai (light) and her own innate greatness. The name “*Hadasa hee Esther*” highlights the inner truth of *Malchus* in its highest form, represented by *Tzaddikim*.¹⁹

This aligns well with Esther’s work in uplifting the lowest realms and revealing the G-dliness innate within them. Esther as *Malchus* also represents *Knesses Yisrael* – the collective Jewish soul. Her being taken to the king in the wintry month of Teves, symbolizes the relationship of Hashem (the king) and the Yidden (Esther)²⁰ even in cold and dark times.

Additionally, when explaining the connection of Purim and Shushan Purim to every Yid, the Rebbe explains that Esther is the same Gimatriya as Shoshanah (connected to Shushan), and that Esther brought about the unity of the Jewish people by calling for every one of them to join in the three-day fast.²¹

The Rebbe repeatedly quoted Chazal that in the merit of Sarah Imeinu who lived all of her 127 years in service of Hashem, Esther ruled over 127 lands. Esther channeled and drew the energy and life of Sarah Imeinu, bringing it to 127 lands – illuminating the entire world with Sara’s light.²² **T**

1. Esther was taken to the palace in the year 3399 (or 362 BCE).

2. Sicha of Shabbos Parshas Tzav Shushan-Purim 5714.

3. Gemara Chulin 139b.

4. The Arizal brings that there was a “Sheidah” that went in her stead to Achashverosh.

5. Sicha Purim 5726.

6. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Tzav, Shushan Purim 5714.

7. Sicha Purim 5731.

8. Sicha Shabbos Shushan Purim 5714, and Purim 5717.

9. Sicha Purim 5731.

10. Sicha Purim 5721.

11. Sicha Parshas Tisa 5731.

12. Sicha Purim 5732.

13. Torah Or. 93d. Sicha of Purim 5717. The maamar explains that the two feasts were to lift up Haman too high where he would inevitably meet his demise.

14. Sicha Purim 5730.

15. Sicha Purim 5724.

16. Sicha Purim 5721.

17. Sicha Purim 5730.

18. Sicha Purim 5733.

19. Likkutei Sichos, vol. 16, Purim 1.

20. Sicha 10 Teves 5745.

21. Yechidus 16 Adar 5750 (fn. 40).

22. Shabbos Parshas Vaykhel Pekudei 5748 (fn. 60).

23. Likkutei Sichos, vol. 16, Purim 1.

IN TORAH

למנצח על אילת השחר מזמור לדוד:
אמר ר' אסי למה נמשלה אסתר לשחר? לומר לך מה שחר סוף כל הלילה
אף אסתר סוף כל הנסים. והא איכא חנוכה? ניתנה לכתוב קא אמרינן.

Rabbi Asi said: Why was Esther likened to the dawn? It is to tell you: Just as the dawn is the conclusion of the entire night, so too, Esther was the conclusion of all miracles performed for the entire Jewish people. But isn't there the miracle of Chanukah which was performed many years later? It is true that additional miracles were performed after the miracle of Purim; however, it is with regard to miracles for which permission was granted to write them in the Tanach that we are saying that the miracle of Purim was the last one.

The Gemara in Megillah explains that Kapitel 22 in Tehillim, "*Lamnatzeiach Al Ayeles Hashachar*" refers to Esther Hamalkah and her prayer "*Keili Keili Loma Azavtani*" (My G-d, why have You forsaken me?) that she recited when she came to the king's chambers to inter-vene for her people.

Following this, the Gemara in Yoma cites a number of reasons why Esther is likened to an *Ayalah* (deer) and to the *Shachar* (dawn). Just as *Shachar* is the end of the night, so too the miracle of Esther is the last miracle included in Tanach.

The Rebbe explains in great detail how Esther and the Purim story relate to this *possuk* and Gemara.

The Miracle of Esther is "*Sof Kol Hanissim*" [the end of all miracles] because Esther is the "*Sof*" – end-goal and purpose of all the *nissim* – bringing G-dliness into the dark and mundane reality. This is emphasized even more in it being the "*Sof*" – the true reality of the miracles that are "*Nitnu Likasev*" [allowed to be written], meaning, the ultimate goal of the miracles that impact and affect the world. Like ink on parchment, these miracles permeate the physical world with G-dly awareness.

Esther – *Sof Kol Hanissim* is like the *Shachar* – *Sof Kol Halaila*. Esther's light doesn't only reach the peripheries of darkness, it permeates the *Sof* – the deepest, darkest elements of night, illuminating the *Shachar* [from the word black].

Shachar is the dawn that cracks and emerges from the darkest hour of the night, transforming it into light. This is the very essence of our great heroine and queen, Esther Hamalka.²³