

REVERBERATIONS OF MEGILLAT ESTHER IN THE LITURGY:

A Search for Spirituality

Senior Project

By Paul Bender, Ph. D.

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for Rabbinic Ordination,
Academy for Jewish Religion, Riverdale, New York, May 2006**

Project advisor: Rabbi Shohama Wiener, Academy for Jewish Religion

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>I. Introduction</u>	2
<u>II. Spiritual Lenses of Connection to Megillat Esther</u>	4
1. The Story of Joseph as a Parallel Lens	4
A. Plot and Linguistic Parallels	5
B. Use of “Doubling”	6
C. Midrashic Comparison	9
2. Connections of Purim with Other Holidays	10
A. Pesach	10
B. Yom Kippur	11
C. Chanukah	11
3. Kabbalistic Lenses	15
A. Lens of the Hidden and the Revealed	15
B. Esther, a Symbol of The Shechinah	17
C. Yom <i>HaKippurim</i>: A Day Like Purim	20
D. The Zohar on Megillat Esther	21
4. The Feminist lens	24
5. Antisemitism	28
A. Amalek and Antisemitism	28
B. Powerlessness and Anti-Semitism	30
6. <i>Hippuch</i>, The Lens of Reversal	33
A. Comic Sense of <i>Hippuch</i> And Jewish Ritual	33
B. <i>Hippuch</i> as Evidence of G*d’s Hand	34
C. <i>Hippuch</i> Reflecting Unexpected Changes in Fate	35

D. <i>Hippuch</i> as the Overthrowing of Winter	35
III. <u>Birchot HaShachar</u>	35
o <i>Modeh Ani</i>	36
o <i>Rayshit Chochmah</i>	37
o <i>Mah Tov</i>	37
o <i>Tsitsit/Tefillin</i>	39
o Blessings	42
o Psalm for Tuesday	48
o Midrash on Psalm 30	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY	52

I. Introduction

Prayer should be a balance between the fixed word, *keva*, established by Jewish law, and the inspiration of the soul, *kavannah*, which must be renewed and refreshed each time we pray. As Heschel has stated, “Jewish prayer is guided by [these] two opposite principles: ...regularity and spontaneity,... law and freedom...the word and that which is beyond words. Since each of the two moves in the opposite direction, equilibrium can only be maintained if both are of equal force. However the pole of regularity proves [time and time again] to be stronger than the pole of spontaneity, and, as a result, there is a perpetual danger of prayer becoming a mere habit... an exercise in repetitiousness.”¹

It is difficult for one who prays regularly to discover new spiritual inspiration while *davening* a prayer service, even for those who are able to comprehend the meaning of the Hebrew words. For those who *daven* in the Hebrew but cannot translate into the English, there are seldom any paths of spiritual connection available. What can we do to help our congregants find new inspiration and spiritual connection each week in the words of their prayers? While we can urge them to use the English translation during prayer, many do this already and, after a time, find no additional spiritual associations. We can help them in times of their major life cycle events by keeping their experiences in mind while we *daven* the services and when these are reflected in the words of the prayers, point out these connections either during the service or in the sermon. Our liturgy is fixed and unchangeable, repeating daily in our movement through time, and liturgical change comes only with the cyclic occurrence of holidays.

However, the scriptural readings of Torah and *Nevi'im* change and are renewed weekly as we proceed through the year. By finding links of the scriptural readings with the words and thoughts of the daily and Shabbat liturgies, we can breathe new levels of meaning and new inspiration into our prayers. Similarly, the holidays, the *chagim*, mark the movement of our Jewish year and each one has been assigned special scriptural readings. On each of the *Shalosh Regalim*, the three pilgrimage festivals, as well as on Purim and *Tisha B'Av*, we also

¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest For God*, (Santa Fe: Aurora Press, 1998), 64-65.

read a book of the *Chamesh Megillot*, the five books, of the Writings. It takes preparation to put oneself in the correct spiritual mindset for a holiday, and this preparation is best done over a period of time in order to build anticipation for the holiday, as well as an understanding of its spiritual color and its multiple levels of meaning.

Reading the liturgy, while keeping the details of another scriptural text in mind, can lead us to new levels of understanding and spiritual elevation through new connections of intertextuality. New levels of spirituality often begin with the resonance of a word, a phrase, or a thought in the liturgy with something from our mind's current frame of reference. When we have studied the scriptural text for the day, we may often find that as we *daven*, resonances in the liturgy occur to us that serve as spiritual bridges to elements of the text. *Davening* with our minds open to these features, we hear new resonances of the scripture in our liturgy and we can awaken ourselves to fresh perceptions, and renew our *kavannah* through our recently acquired mental awareness within our prayers.

It is time to examine both the liturgy and the prescribed scriptural readings for their reverberations of the changing cycles of the Jewish year. I have been doing this in a haphazard way for my congregation, as the spirit moves me at the moment. I find that sharing a word or phrase in the liturgical text that resonates for me from the weekly Torah portion is sometimes sufficient to stimulate congregational thought and interest. Yet the time has come for an organized collection of material for spiritual leaders to draw upon in their constant search to awaken the spirituality of their congregants.

This work is an attempt to begin to compile some of these resonances for the weeks prior to Purim, particularly for *Shabbat Zachor*. Varied lenses of analysis of the *Megillat Esther* will be examined in the next section to develop new methodology. Through these lenses, I will look for links of spiritual connection between some of the weekly prayers of *Birchot Hashachar*, the early morning service, and the Book of Esther, the main scriptural text for the Holiday of Purim. I am using the *Birchot Hashachar* service,

simply as an illustrative example, for it is clear that this approach can be extended to all the services.

Can we expect our congregants to have the relevant scriptural text open in their minds while reading the liturgy, even on the holiday itself? Often the only ones who will have prepared the text and understand it are the rabbi and cantor. It is just too unrealistic to hope for this kind of comprehension in our congregants, unless we are willing to take the time to develop this understanding through our sermons or a multi-session course given over the weeks prior to the holiday. While a comprehensive study of the text is a great way to begin a course, we usually only have about 15 minutes to get a message across in a sermon. How are we to sensitize our congregants to different ways of looking at the text?

I have found that the material I collected and developed in the next section on the “Lenses of Esther”, was a great source of sermon/course material to increase understanding and sensitivity to the Book of Esther. After giving four sermons on different aspects of the “lenses of the *Megillat Esther*”, I found that many of my congregants were receptive to this connection of the scriptural text with the liturgical word on *Shabbat Zachor*. While the lenses I chose were useful in developing *kavanah*, many other approaches are possible and would lead to new and different connections with the liturgy. I offer this material merely as an introduction to, rather than a comprehensive treatment of, the connections of the spirituality of Purim with the liturgy of the *Birchot Hashachar* service.

II. Spiritual Lenses of Connection to *Megillat Esther*

There are many lenses with different views of focus available for us to experiment with, in our reading of the liturgy through the perspective of the *Megillat Esther*. Each will modify our perspective of the words and meaning of the liturgy. At times several lenses will be explored in combination toward our search for new spiritual connection. Among these methodologies, we will explore the lenses of:

1. The story of Joseph
2. The Connection of Purim with Other Holidays
3. The Kabbalah and The *Zohar*

4. A Feminist Perspective
5. *Amalek* and Antisemitism
6. *Hippuch*-Reversal

1. **The Story of Joseph as a Parallel Lens**

There are many surprising connections between the story of Joseph in Genesis and the Book of Esther, as I will explore below. Some of these connections include:

- A. plot and linguistic parallels
- B. the use of “doubling” to connect and compare events and characters
- C. comparisons within the midrash.

These parallels in connection to the story of Joseph give us another valuable lens of spiritual connection which we will use sensitize ourselves to the text of our prayers.

A. Plot and Linguistic Parallels Between *Megillat Esther* and the Joseph Story.

There are many motifs of plot and language that can be seen to be shared by both stories. Here is a partial list:

- Joseph was forcibly taken as a slave (to Egypt, Gen. 37:28), just as Esther too was forcibly taken from her uncle Mordecai into the beauty contest (Meg. Est. 2:8) where she was required to lose her virginity.
- Both stories take place outside of the Land of Israel.
- Once Joseph was in Egypt, he was noticed for his handsome features, *y'fay to 'ar vi'fay mareh* (Gen. 39:6), but this stoked the fire of *Potiphar's* wife's adulterous desire (Gen. 39:7), just as Esther's great beauty, *y'fat to 'ar v'tovat mareh* (Meg. Est. 2:7), caused her to be taken from Mordecai by the king's men. It was Esther's beauty, though, that was the reason she rose to stature despite all the other contestants.
- While Joseph was noticed for his handsome appearance, he rose to power through his gifts of dream interpretation and intelligence (Gen. 40:39-40). Esther too is remembered by Jews, less for her beauty than for her later sagacity at engineering

Haman's downfall and the salvation of *Bnei Yisrael* from annihilation (Meg. Est. chapters 8-10).

- Ultimately, Joseph, like Esther, also used his position to save *B'nei Yisrael*, in Joseph's case, from starvation in Canaan (Gen. 45:13).
- Both Joseph (Gen. 41:41-44) as well as Esther (Meg. Est. 8:1-2) rose to positions which were second only to the ruler in power, in the government of a foreign country.
- Joseph saved the ruler of Egypt by saving his country from famine, and Mordecai saved the king of Persia from assassination.
- In both stories, a chief servant of the ruler was hung by the ruler; i.e. Pharaoh's baker (Gen. 40:22), and the king's chief minister *Haman* (Meg. Est. 7:10).
- In both stories, two servants of the ruler acted immorally. In the Joseph story, the Baker was hung for his deeds, and the butler did not keep his promise to Joseph until the circumstances forced him to do so. In *Megillat Esther*, two servants plotted to kill the king. In both stories the hero finally achieved recognition and stature with the help of G*d's intervention.
- In both stories, a ring of power and authority was given to a Jewish male figure. In the story of Joseph, Pharaoh gave Joseph his signet ring to save Egypt from famine (Gen. 41:42), and in the Book of Esther, the king gave his ring of authority to Mordecai to save the Jews from genocide Meg. Est. 8:2).
- Joseph's good deed of foretelling the freeing of the butler (Gen. 40:12) was forgotten, as was Mordecai's good deed of saving the king from assassination (Meg. Est. 2:21-23).
- In both of these stories, G*d intervened at night to remedy the forgetfulness.
- G*d's remedy, in both cases, was through troubling the ruler's sleep; in Joseph's case (Gen. 41:1), by G*d sending Pharaoh troubling dreams to interrupt his sleep twice, and in Mordecai's case (Meg. Est. 6:1), by G*d not allowing the king to sleep at all.

B. Use of "Doubling" to Connect and Compare Events and Characters

1. Doubling in the Story of Joseph

A key feature of the story of Joseph is that of doubling or pairing. This doubling was suggested to me years ago by one of my professors of Bible, Rabbi A. Darnoff. I'll illustrate this feature by listing only ten of the almost countless examples:

- a. Every dream in the Joseph story was paired with a second dream (Gen. 37:5, 9; 40:5; 41:1, 5) for a total of 3 dream pairs.
- b. Joseph's garment was forcibly removed from him twice; first, the robe of authority was taken by the hands of his brothers (Gen. 37:23), and second, his garment as a servant of *Potiphar*, was taken by the hand of *Potiphar's* wife (Gen. 39:12). In both cases the person, whose hands removed the garment, lied about the circumstances to a figure of authority.
- c. Two brothers went down (*yarad*); Joseph taken forcibly down to Egypt in chains (Gen. 37:28), and Judah, after showing his father the blood stained coat, also went down in stature, in the eyes of his brothers (Gen. 38:1).
- d. Joseph was sold twice to groups of merchants, the *Ishmaelites* and the *Midianites* (Gen. 37:28).
- e. There are two stories of seduction; Joseph who fled from the adulterous desires of *Potiphar's* wife (Gen. 39:12), and Judah who paid for Tamar's sexual favors (Gen. 38:16);
- f. Joseph's grandmother Rebecca had two sons, Joseph's mother Rachel had two sons with Jacob, Tamar had two sons with Judah, and Joseph had two sons with his Egyptian wife.
- g. Joseph inherited two tribal portions rather than one (Gen. 48:22).
- h. Joseph was 17 years old when his brothers tried to permanently separate him from his father Jacob (Gen. 37:2), and after Jacob was rejoined with Joseph, Jacob lived another 17 years in Egypt, before his death (Gen. 47:28).
- i. A goat was used in each of two stories of deception, the first goat was slaughtered for the blood to stain Joseph's coat to deceive Jacob (Gen. 37:31), the second was the price that Tamar deceptively charged Judah for sexual relations with her (Gen. 38:17) in order to obtain his cord, seal and staff of authority.
- j. Only two brothers of the twelve were singled out by Jacob for special blessings, Judah who was blessed with kingship, as leader of *Bnei Yisrael*, and Joseph who was blessed both with an extra tribal portion and the five fold blessing of his father, the Abrahamic blessing which Isaac gave to Jacob before Jacob left for *Haran*.

Joseph explains the phenomenon of the doubling of Pharaoh's dreams in Gen. 41:32 where he says that the doubling: "is because the matter is established by G*d, and G*d will shortly bring it to pass." Perhaps, then, for each instance of doubling in the story of Joseph, we are witnessing the hand of G*d setting the stage for Israel's redemption. What then can be said of the *Megillat Esther*?

2. Doubling in *Megillat Esther*

Along with this doubling or pairing, as a common motif in the story of Joseph, we also see strong elements of this same doubling motif throughout every element in the Book of Esther.² For example:

- a. The king gave two wine feasts, one for his dignitaries, and the second for the people of *Shushan*.
- b. His queen, *Vashti*, simultaneously gave her own wine feast.
- c. This is a story of two queens, *Vashti* and Esther.
- d. Similarly, Esther inexplicably hosted two wine feasts, one of which had no apparent function, before she finally told the king what was bothering her at the second feast.
- e. Esther invited only two guests, the king and *Haman* to both feasts.
- f. The gallows which *Haman* had built for one purpose, was ultimately used for a second purpose.
- g. *Haman* thought "the man the king wishes to honor" was himself, but it was a second, Mordecai.
- h. There were two royal decrees concerning the Jews, one engineered by *Haman* for death, and the second engineered by Esther for life.
- i. Twice the king extended the golden scepter to Queen Esther when she appeared to petition for the lives of her people (Meg. Est. 5:2-4, 8:4-6).
- j. The anti-Semitic Persians who would have destroyed the Jews are themselves destroyed in two days of slaughter.

² Daniel F. Polish, "Aspects of Ester: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Megillah of Esther and the Origins of Purim", *JSOT* 85, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, (1999), 86-89.

k. The day appointed for the destruction of Jews becomes the day appointed for a second purpose, the destruction of the anti-Semites.

l. The king gave his ring to *Haman* to **destroy** of the Jews, but he later gave it a second time to Mordecai in order to **save and protect** the Jews.

The story of Joseph implies that the doubling of an event demonstrates that it has been established by G*d. The *Megillat Esther* never once mentions G*d, yet His hidden providential hand appears time and time again in the form of coincidental accidents of fate. We will speak of this further, in the section on the lens of Kabbalah: G*d's hiddenness.

C. Midrashic Comparison of *Megillat Esther* to the Joseph Story

The similarities of the two stories were recognized by the Rabbis of the Midrash [ילקוט שמעוני אסתר רמז] where:

“Rabbi Yochanan states in the name of Rabbi □ Binyamin bar Levi:
The trials of Rachel's sons [i.e. Joseph, and his full brother Benjamin's descendant, Mordecai] are equivalent and their greatness is □ equivalent.

Their **trials are equivalent** as it is written (Gen. 39:10):

And it was, as □ she [*Potiphar's* wife] **spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not hearken to her,**

and (from Meg. Esther 3:4):

Now it was when they [the king's servants] **spoke to him [Mordecai] daily, and he did not hearken to them** [to obey the king's command to bow to *Haman*]...

Their **greatness is equivalent**, (from Gen. 41:42-3):

And **Pharaoh took off his ring** □ from his hand, [and put it on Joseph's hand, and he made him to ride in the □ second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, “Bow the knee” and □ **made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.**]

and (from Esther 8:2)

The King **took off his ring** which he had taken from *Haman* and gave it to Mordecai. And **Esther set Mordecai over the house of *Haman*...**³

So we see that the rabbis of *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni Esther* had noticed the strong parallels in moral character, and plot motif relating Mordecai in *Megillat Esther* to Joseph in the Genesis text. Further, and most important, they noted the striking similarity in both imagery and language used in these two sets of parallel verses, which cannot help but make a serious student of the Bible sit up and take notice at this connection. Since the connection was thus clear, they then made a connection of *yichus*, of ancestry, linking them together through their maternal house of origin. Joseph and Mordecai were viewed as brothers because Mordecai was a descendant of Joseph's brother Benjamin, therefore they were linked as the descendants/("sons") of Rachel, Jacob's only chosen wife. Thus both are stories about Rachel's descendants ("sons") who demonstrate their greatness both through meeting the challenges of their moral trials and through their rise to great political power.

Therefore, as we look for reverberations from the Book of Esther in our prayers, it is helpful to be aware of this twinning to the story of Joseph, and be sensitive to connections from this source to *Megillat Esther* as well.

2. Connections of Purim with other Holidays

A. Purim and Pesach:

In the interrelation of the stories of Joseph and Esther, we cannot avoid two other connections which bring up the ultimate question of why these two stories are linked.

1. While the story of Joseph is a story of G*d's saving *B'nei Yisrael* from famine through the efforts of Joseph, it is also the necessary prequel for the story of Pharaoh's enslavement of *B'nei Yisrael* and their redemption in the seamlessly connected book of the Torah, Exodus. Our Holiday of Freedom, of *Herut*, or Pesach, has no prequel holiday which tells the story of Joseph.

³ Yalkut Shimoni Esther, 247.

2. Perhaps, the connection of the text of *Megillat Esther*, the primary text of the Holiday of Purim, with the story of Joseph, a prequel to the Holiday of Pesach, may be to function as a means of hidden connection of these two consecutive holidays, Purim and Pesach.

Both of these holidays occur in the spring, Purim at the earliest stirrings of spring, and Pesach when rebirth is well underway.

Another hidden connection of these two holidays lies within the special scriptural readings of the five *megillot* that are read on each holiday. Within the Book of Esther, as we will see in our Kabbalah section below, as well as within *Shir Hashirim*, the Song of Songs, G*d's name is absent (see Kabbalah section 3A below) and these books of the *Ketuvim* are read on the holidays of Purim and Pesach respectively. These are the only two books of the *Tanach* which do not mention G*d's Name at all and so they are connected together through G*d's hiddenness. While G*d's name is hidden in the Song of Songs, but revealed within its metaphors on the Holiday of Pesach, His name is similarly hidden in the *Megillat Esther*, but His actions revealed within the *hippuch*, overturning of evil (see below in section 6 *hippuch*) so characteristic of this Book and the Holiday of Purim.

Even the characteristic feature of Purim, *hippuch*, which involves a simultaneous overturning of the dominance of evil over good, has a similar parallel within the holiday of Pesach, since we mark the saving of Israel at the sea simultaneously with the destruction of Pharaoh and his armies within the sea.

B. Connection of Purim with Yom Kippur

These two holidays, which are so different from a ritual perspective that it appears they could not possibly be further apart, have strong rabbinic connections in the *Zohar* and in the mystical traditions of Habad Chassidism, as we will see in section 3, below.

C. Connection of Purim and Chanukah

Is there a similarity between the events of the Book of Esther describing a two day battle with anti-Semitic Persians citizens, and the record of the Hasmonean battles with the Selucid Greek Empire of Syria in the first and second books of the Maccabees which indicates a war

lasting over 20 years with the well armed regular armies of the Syrian Greek Empire? Are these holidays connected?

Chanukah is a holiday of rededication, called “the festival of lights”, celebrating the miracle of the oil occurring near the winter solstice, while Purim is a holiday of drinking and masquerading, of happiness and joy, of marking the end of winter and the beginning of spring. While Purim has a whole book of the *Tanach* (*Megillat Esther*) which is the central reading of the holiday, Chanukah is a holiday without descriptive biblical reading in the *Tanach*, the Jewish cannon.

There is no official Jewish canonized scripture which describes the events of the Hasmonean wars, other than the historically flawed medieval account of the *Megillat HaChashmonaim*, accepted by *Saadyah Gaon*⁴ Similarly, while an entire tractate of the Talmud (Talmud *Bavli*, *Megillah*) is dedicated to the central scriptural reading of Purim, there is very little Talmudic commentary on Chanukah (Shabbat 21b). Finally, the *Rambam* states that while all the Books of the Prophets and the Writings will be nullified in the days of the Messiah, the book of Esther will continue along with the Oral Law and the five books of the Torah⁵

In spite of the fact that the connection between these two holidays does not appear obvious, the liturgy of the *Amidah* makes a very strong case for the connection between them. This liturgical connection is through the “*Al Hanisim*” prayer in the *Hoda'ah*, or thanksgiving section of the *Amidah*, for both holidays the prayer begins with the verse:

עַל הַנְּסִים, וְעַל הַפְּרָקִים, וְעַל הַגְּבוּרֹת, וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת, וְעַל הַמְּלַחְמוֹת,
שְׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

[Thank you Oh L*rd] for the miracles, the redemption, the mighty acts, the triumphs, and for the battles which you performed for our ancestors in those days at this time.

⁴ Philip Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book*, (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co, 1949), 713.

⁵ Rambam, *Mishna Torah*, Megillah 2:18.

Thus the liturgical connection begins by placing both stories in the thanksgiving, or *Hoda'ah* section, to thank G*d for His salvation **with the identical verse of thanksgiving**, despite the many differences in the two events. It seeks to find commonality, as we will see in the body of the prayer for each specific holiday.

[Blue type is used to point out similarities, while red type is used to note the contrasts between the liturgical pieces for the two holidays.]

For Purim:

בִּימֵי מֶרְדֵּכַי וְאַסְתֵּר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבֵּירָה, כְּשֶׁעָמַד עֲלֵיהֶם הַמֶּן הַרָשָׁע, בִּקְשׁ לְהַשְׁמִיד, לְהַרְגׁ וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת כָּל הַיְהוּדִים, מִנְּעַר וְעַד זָקֵן, טָף וְנָשִׁים, בְּיוֹם אֶחָד בְּשִׁלְשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר, הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר, וּשְׁלָלָם לְבוֹן. וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים הִפְרַתְּ אֶת עֲצָתוֹ, וְקִלְקַלְתָּ אֶת מַחְשַׁבְתּוֹ, וְהִשְׁבֹּתָ לוֹ גְּמוּלוֹ בְּרִאשׁוֹ, וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת בְּנָיו עַל הָעֵץ.

In the days of Mordecai and Esther, in *Shushan* the capital, when the wicked *Haman* rose up against them and sought to destroy, slay and wipe out all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in one day on the 13th of the 12th month of Adar, and to plunder their wealth. You in great mercy frustrated his counsel and upset his plan; You caused his mischief to return upon his own head so that he and his sons were hanged on the gallows.

For Chanukah:

בִּימֵי מַתְתַּיְהוּ בֶּן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל, חֲשֹׁמוֹנָאִי וּבְנָיו, כְּשֶׁעָמְדָה מַלְכוּת יוֹן הַרָשָׁעָה עַל עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשְׁפִּיחֶם תּוֹרָתְךָ, וּלְהַעֲבִירֶם מִחֻקֵּי רְצוֹנְךָ, וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים עֲמַדְתָּ לָהֶם בְּעֵת צָרָתָם, רַבַּת אֶת רִיבָם, נָתַתְּ אֶת דֵּינָם, נִקְמַתְּ אֶת נַקְמָתָם, מִסַּרְתָּ גְבוּרִים בְּיַד חֲלָשִׁים, וְרַבִּים בְּיַד מְעֻטִּים, וּטְמֵאִים בְּיַד טְהוּרִים, וְרָשָׁעִים בְּיַד צְדִיקִים, וְזוֹדִים בְּיַד עוֹסְקֵי תּוֹרָתְךָ. וְיָדָה עֲשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ, וּלְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲשִׂיתָ תְּשׁוּעָה גְּדוֹלָה וּפְרָקָן כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. וְאַחֲרַי בֶּן בָּאֵו בְּנֵיךְ לְדַבֵּיר בֵּיתְךָ, וּפָנּוּ אֶת הַיְכָלְךָ, וְטָהְרוּ אֶת מִקְדָּשְׁךָ, וְהִדְלִיקוּ נֵרוֹת בְּחֻצְרוֹת קִדְשֶׁךָ, וְקִבְּעוּ שְׁמוֹנֶת יָמֵי חֲנֻכַּת אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל.

In the days of Mattathias ben Yochanan, the Hasmonean, the High Priest, and his sons, when a wicked Hellenic government rose up against thy people Israel to make them forget your Torah and transgress the laws of your will. You in your great mercy stood by them in the time of their distress. You championed their cause, defended their rights, avenged their

wrong; You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of the students of Your Torah. You made a great and holy name for yourself in your world, and you performed for your people Israel a great deliverance to this day. Then your children entered the shrine of your house, cleansed your Temple, purified your sanctuary, kindled lights in your holy courts, and designated these eight days of Chanukah for giving thanks and praise to your great name.

The descriptive prayer for both holidays begins with the same word *Biymay, in the days of*, followed by the letter *Mem*, as the first letter of a Jewish male. For Purim the *Mem* is for Mordecai, and similarly for Chanukah the *Mem* is for Mattathias.

The next thought begins with *the evil that arose upon them*, and in both cases it is described by the words *Keh'sheh'am(ad/dah)*, when arose, *Al(eyhem)* upon (them)/Your people, *Amechah*. The evil force is introduced with the word, *Har(a)sha'ah*, and defined as *Haman* for Purim, and as the *Hellenic government* for Chanukah. With the use of these few common words to express the arising evil, the two stories are equated and at the same time differentiated into evil arising from the enmity of a single individual, *Haman*, versus the evil plan of the entire *Hellenic government*. In the first case, the evil design is to *destroy every Jewish person*, while in the second, it is *to lead the people away from G*d's law*. Though these two evils appear different at face value, yet there is a sense from this prayer, that both evils would have obliterated the Jewish people, the first through physical destruction, and the second through spiritual attrition followed by assimilation.

The Purim prayer goes on to say that G*d *frustrated his (Haman's) council and upset his plan*, and the Chanukah version says that *You stood by them* and championed their cause, defended their rights, and avenged their wrong. These words are different and differentiate the evils into the one which was planned and decreed but had yet to be realized (*Megillat Esther*), versus the other which was already being carried out, and required divine championing of the rebellion. However in both cases there is a clear understanding of the prayer that G*d actively intervened to help His people.

Particularly dramatic, in these prayers, is the parallel seen in comparing the methods of G*d's deliverance. The prayer for Purim states that G*d caused his [*Haman's*] mischief to return upon his own head, which is overturning, or *hippuch* (see section 6 on *hippuch*). This is in keeping with the characteristic of the redemption of Purim. However, the prayer for Chanukah states "You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of the students of Your Torah", but this too is a form of *hippuch*, of overturning of the expected, i.e. the strong and the many would be expected to overwhelm the weak and the few. Thus there is a dramatic sense from this prayer that G*d's deliverance in both stories was in the form of *hippuch*, an overturning of fortune of the strong vs. the weak, the many vs. the few, the impure vs. the pure, the wicked vs. the righteous, and the arrogant vs. the students of Torah.

So we see that these two holidays are connected in the liturgy not only because both are minor holidays of winter, but also because both describe a threat to the existence of the Jewish people which is overthrown, through *hippuch*, by means of Divine intervention.

3. Kabbalistic Lenses in *Megillat Esther*.

There are many aspects of the *Megillat Esther* which can be viewed through the lenses of Kabbalistic mysticism. One of the major lenses in this category is the Lens of the Hidden and the Revealed.

A. Lens of the Hidden and the Revealed.

Kabbalah, by its very mystical nature, seeks to simultaneously reveal and conceal wisdom of the Divine. As in the sciences, the hidden or unknown serves as the irresistible impetus to seek deeper meanings and connections. Kabbalah and the *Zohar* recognize that all of the *Tanach* is flowing with concealed levels of meaning. These levels are revealed only through discovering the hidden and then searching deeper.

o G*d is completely hidden in the *Megillat Esther*. Neither G*d's name, nor any direct reference to Him, not even a prayer to Him, is mentioned once in this book. The only other

book of the *Tanach* which shares this striking property is *Shir HaShirim*. Whenever a Jewish leap year occurs (about every one in 2.5 years) we add the month of Adar II. In that case, for *Shabbat Zachor*, the Shabbat before Purim, we always read in the Torah from *parashat Vayikra*, which begins with the word *Vayikra* whose last letter, an aleph, is written noticeably smaller than usual in the Torah. This first phrase reads: He called to Moses, but **the Name of G*d is missing** from this first phrase of this 3rd book of the Torah. Yet the Torah provides enough hints that the missing name of the caller who calls to Moses can only be G*d. One of these hints is the diminutive aleph hidden at the end of the word *Vayikra*. The Holy Name of G*d, which He gave only to Moses at the Burning Bush “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*” has three words each of which begins with the letter aleph. Is it that **the name of G*d is hiding** at the end of the first word of *Vayikra*, hiding, but visible to those who are looking for the hidden within the words of G*d? Just as the name of G*d is missing here, but hinted at in *Megillat Esther*, G*d’s physical name is missing but his presence is visible to those readers who perceive the hand of G*d in the amazing beneficial coincidences of the events in their lives.⁶ Thus a clear message of this Book of Esther is that **G*d is revealed in the ordinary coincidences of blessing in our lives.**

o The king **appears** at first mention to be a highly powerful ruler, but before the end of the first chapter we find that his power is **revealed** to be all smoke, for he cannot even successfully command his wife to appear before him when he desires. Nor can he even make a simple decision by himself. He does not have the compassion to temper his anger, or the wisdom to carefully think through the consequences of his actions and therefore he allows evil to be done by his advisors in his name. In Kabbalistic terms, the left side of the *sefirotic* tree, judgment, or Din, is not balanced on the right by loving-kindness, *Chesed*, and wisdom. This permits evil, the *Sitra Achra*, to emerge from the left side, in the human form of *Haman*, the highest of the king’s 7 evil ministers/chamberlains, who easily manipulates the king. The *sefirotic* tree of THE KING is perverted to become the tree of EVIL, the *Sitra Achra*.⁷ This

⁶ Paul Bender, *He Calls from the Small Aleph*, Vayikra, Divrei Torah, 5765

<<http://www.ajrsem.org/divreitorah/vayikra.htm>>.

⁷ Elliot R. Wolfson, “Left Contained in Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics”, *AJS Review* 11, (1986), 27-52.

is also the evil tree that *Haman* constructs to hang Mordecai. Under Esther's influence the evil tree becomes an instrument of the *Shechinah* for justice.

B. Esther, a Symbol of The *Shechinah*.

Esther's Hebrew name is *Hadassah*, yet she is only called by this name once in the entire *Megillah* (Meg. Est. 2:7). When Esther is first introduced to us, the text introduces her as *Hadassah* and then it immediately hides her Jewish name with **the name Esther which itself (*astir*), in Hebrew, means hidden**. The *Megillat Esther* thus reveals her Hebrew name only once at her first introduction, and in that very same verse immediately hides her Hebrew name with the Persian name Esther, in chapter 2 verse number seven. With the exception of that verse, *Hadassah* remains "hidden" by the Persian name Esther, just as G*d is "hidden" by the absence of His Hebrew Name throughout this book of the *Tanach*, and only revealed through his actions. Seven, the verse in which *Hadassah*'s name was revealed, is the number of her handmaidens in the king's court, and it is also the important mystical number of the seven lower sefirot. Because both *Hadassah*'s name and G*d's name are the only two which are hidden in this "book of hiding", mystically, we are primed that she is the figure to watch and study.

Esther is often associated with the kabbalistic *sefirah* of *Malchut/Shechinah*.⁸ The Talmud ascribes to Rabbi *Yehoshua Ben Korchah* the following statement:

ר' יהושע בן קרחה אמר אסתר ירקרוקת היתה וחוט של חסד משוך עליה

that Esther was greenish, from her name *Hadassah*, (like a myrtle, *hadas*, which is green) but G*d drew over her a thread of kindness/grace (which Rashi tells us, "made her appear beautiful to the nations and to *Achashverosh*").⁹ David Blumenthal describes *Tiferet* as "the inner voice of God...the mixing of unconditional love and unconditional demand into a compassionate, merciful attitude.... It is masculine.... represented by the letter vav, the color green (yellow)".¹⁰ While the *sefirah* of *Shechinah* is represented by changing colors, when Esther as *Shechinah* entered into the presence of the King, her color of green as described in

⁸ David R. Blumenthal, <<http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/ZoharicTexts.html>>.

⁹ Talmud Bavli, Megillah 13a.

¹⁰ Blumenthal.

the Talmud, seems reflective of her union with the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*. Just as her hidden name and color associates her with the *Shechinah*, Esther's personal courage and bravery as well as her compassion for her people, which she exhibits in chapter 4, reminds us of the immanent presence of G*d, the *sefirah* of *Shechinah*, which protects G*d's people. Esther, like the *Shechinah*, holds in check the unjust use of the hand of judgment against the children of Israel in exile; but how was this accomplished?

כְּנֶשֶׁר יַעִיר קִנּוֹ עַל-גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחֶף יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְּפָיו יִקְחֵהוּ יִשְׂאֵהוּ עַל-אַבְרָתוֹ: ה' בְּדָד יִנְחֵנוּ

“like an eagle [the *Shechinah*] that stirs up its nest, hovering over its young spreads out its wings, takes them, and bears them upon its pinions; So the Lord alone did lead him..” (Deut. 32: 11,12).

First, Esther awakened all of the Jews of the city of *Shushan*, her enclosed, walled city, her nest, to stir them all, to call upon G*d's mercy by requiring them to pray and fast for three days and nights (Meg. Est. 4:16). Three days is the length of time that G*d told Moses to have the children of Israel wash their garments and purify themselves before appearing before G*d at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:10,11). Esther and her seven maidens similarly fasted for three days and nights, or 72 hours. The text then states that she dressed herself in a **queenly garment** (Meg. Est. 5:1), which the Hebrew states as *Malchut* (*Malchut* is also another name for *Shechinah*). While the physical garment she wore was her robe of the Queen of Persia, what of her spiritual garment?

The *Zohar* talks of the “**garment of one's days**”, i.e. a “woven radiant garment” of all one's pure sinless days on earth which becomes the spiritual radiant garment to adorn one's soul and “usher him in to the presence of the Holy King”, in the world to come.¹¹ In a similar sense, Esther was clothed with a spiritual **garment** woven from the 72 hours of fasting, and prayer of both the Jews of *Shushan*, and of Esther together with her seven maidens. To this she added her personal courage, and faith in G*d, as well as her compassion for her people. Thus did Esther metaphorically ascended before the Heavenly King enrobed in this spiritually radiant garment of *Malchut/Shechinah*, and entered the court of *Achashveros*, regally enrobed in all her queenly beauty, and magnificence and courage.

¹¹ Daniel Matt, *Zohar, The Book of Enlightenment*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 91-93.

Nevertheless, she had told Mordecai, “if I will perish, I will perish” (Meg. Est. 4:16), using the word *B’chayn*, since she was violating *Achashverosh*’s law that she may not come unbidden to him.

ובכן.....וכאשר אבדתִי אבדתִי.

This word, *B’chayn*, has the gematria of 72 (2+20+50), which corresponds to the Holy 72-lettered Name of G*d. When this *B’chayn* of 72 is added to the two 72 hour fasts of purification (one for the Jews of *Shushan* and one for Esther and her “seven maidens”) we have three 72’s, which correspond to the three verses of exactly 72 letters in Exodus 14:19, 14:20, and 14:21. It is in these three consecutive verses of 72 letters, that the Torah tells us G*d protected the children of Israel at the sea with the pillar of cloud, and then sent a strong east wind to split the Sea of Reeds, letting the children of Israel cross through, while destroying their enemies who pursued after them.

According to *Shlomo Alkabetz* in “*Manos HaLevi*”, the Kabbalah is telling us that Esther invoked the power of the 72 lettered Name of G*d used to protect Israel from its enemies at the sea, subsequent to her coming before the heavenly King.¹² However, it appears that Esther invoked the Name of 72 letters three times, the first time was the fast and prayer of the Jews enclosed within the walled city of *Shushan*, the second time, the fast and prayer of Esther and her seven maidens, and the third time Esther’s use of the term *B’chayn*, i.e. her courage, bravery and faith in the saving power of the heavenly King. Thus did Esther awaken both the earthly king (*Achashverosh*) and the heavenly King to compassion for her and her people, to protect them and destroy their enemies, as He did at the sea.

This story of protection of the *Shechinah* in *Megillat Esther* has a strong parallel with the discourse of Rabbi Abba in the *Zohar*, Bamidbar, parshat Beha’alotecha.¹³ There, Rabbi Abba speaks of the salvation of the first born of Israel on the night of the *Shechinah*’s passing through Egypt to destroy all the first born of the land, and fulfill the tenth and final

¹² Shlomo, Alkabetz, *Manos HaLevi*. (trans. Carmel Kehati), 263, <<http://www.thirtysevenbooks.com/HolyDays/Purim.3.5762.htm>>.

¹³ *Zohar*, Bamidbar, *Soncino trans.*, (Brooklyn, N.Y: Soncino Press, Judaic Classics Library, 1984), 3:149a.

plague. G*d told Moses to tell *Bnei Yisrael* to prepare themselves by circumcision of the males, and then place the blood together with that of the paschal lamb in **three marks** (of G*d's Name) upon their houses (on the two door posts and on the lintel) and close themselves in their homes. Thus did G*d spare the first born in the homes of the children of Israel marked in blood with three symbols of the Name of G*d. In a similar way were the Jews of *Shushan* enclosed within the walls of the city, and marked three times, by G*d's Name in the 72 hours of their fast, the 72 hours of Esther's fast, and the 72 of the *B'cheyn* of Esther's courage and faith in G*d's salvation. Thus did Esther prepare before entering into the court of the heavenly King, and so she was received with favor in His eyes. So too was she received with favor in the eyes of king *Achashverosh*, her husband.

C. Yom HaKippurim: A Day Like Purim.

o *Shneur Zalman* of Lyady compared Yom Kippur to Purim¹⁴ On Yom Kippur, the High Priest casts lots to decide which of the two goats will be thrown into the valley of *Azazel*, and on Purim, *Haman* cast lots to determine the most propitious date to slaughter the Jews of Persia, so both lots were cast to decide a slaughtering. On both days we draw closer to G*d; on Yom Kippur we fast and ignore the needs of the body to focus on our spiritual connection to G*d. On Purim we maintain our connection to the needs of the material world and integrate these as a vehicle for spiritual connection. We use our everyday reality to help us connect to the presence of G*d in our lives. Yom Kippur is taste of the World to Come, the *Olam Habah*, when all will be spirit and the material world ceases to exist, while Purim is a taste of the days of the *Mashiach*, when the material and spiritual worlds remain integrated. In this sense, Yom Kippur is *Yom HaKippurim*, a day like Purim. “What was achieved through fasting and abstinence on Yom Kippur is achieved through celebration and feasting on Purim”. On Purim, “the difficulties of life inform us rather than oppress us; they lose their negative quality. Darkness is transformed into light”¹⁵

¹⁴ Joel Ziff, *Mirrors in Time, A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through Jewish Year*, (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 297.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

The image of Mordecai dressed in the king's robes with a royal crown led through the streets on the king's horse by *Haman*, is seen by *Shneur Zalman*¹⁶ as a metaphor. The garment of the king "symbolizes the experience of G*d as immanent", "the crown symbolizes....G*d as transcendent", and these are carried by the horse, which is "a symbol for the process of revelation through Torah". Mordecai, who symbolizes humility and self-nullification (*bitul*), is crowned and raised up, and is led by *Haman* who is concerned only with himself, symbolizing material self-centeredness. However, together they represent integrated personality, a balance between Mordecai and *Haman*, between humility and pride. We walk with humility with lowered eyes, but our heart burns with desire to be joined to G*d's immanence and transcendence.

D. The Zohar on Megillat Esther.

o Zoharic Connections of The Joseph Story With The Book of Esther.

While the *Zohar* has many comments on the story of Joseph¹⁷, it also connects of story of Joseph with the Book of Esther¹⁸ opening with Pharaoh's dream of the cows emerging from the river. There it states that "the river [is].... the (heavenly) stream which flows perpetually, waters and feeds [blesses and sustains] the whole and Joseph was himself the river by means of which the whole of Egypt was blessed. By that (heavenly) river, seven grades [the Divine sefirot] are irrigated and blessed, they being well favored and fat-fleshed....The number seven has everywhere a similar symbolism, e.g. the seven maidens and the seven chamberlains mentioned in the Book of Esther (Meg. Est. 2:9; 1:10). R. Isaac said that the seven good cows symbolize the superior grades, and the seven lean and ill-favored cows, other [*Sitra Achra*] and lower grades; the former from the side of holiness and the latter from the side of defilement." Thus it appears that not only is the *Zohar* connecting Joseph with G*d's flow of blessing upon Egypt, but the flow is associated with the 7 good cows, i.e. the lower seven of the Divine *sefirotic* tree, and the 7 lean cows are from another "grade", the side of defilement, i.e. the *Sitra Achra*, or the "dark" side, for "Star Wars" fans]. The *Zohar*'s recognition of the parallel symbolism of the seven maidens (of Esther), i.e. the side

¹⁶ Ibid., 301.

¹⁷ Matt, 80-90.

¹⁸ *Zohar*, Bereshith, *Soncino trans.*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Soncino Press, Judaic Classics Library, 1984), 1:194a.

of holiness, and the seven chamberlains (of the king), i.e. the *Sitra Achra*, with the similar symbolism of the two types of cows of Pharaoh's dream in the Joseph story is a clear kabbalistic connection of these two stories.

o **The Zohar Connects Yom Kippur and Purim.**

The *Zohar* connects aspects of Yom Kippur with Purim in a parable.¹⁹ In Jewish mystical parables, the king usually is a metaphor for The King on High, and his errant child, the prince or princess, is usually a metaphor for the children of Israel.

In this parable, a king once became angry with his son, and called the minister, whose office was to punish offenders, to prepare to chastise his son the next day. The function of this parable is to provide the *Zohar* with a mystical explanation for the biblical description of the offering of two goats on Yom Kippur. The first goat, slaughtered by the High Priest, is clearly an offering to G*d to pardon the sins of Israel. This offering, the *Zohar* represents as a private feast only for the King himself and his son, i.e. G*d and *B'nei Yisrael*.

But what was the need for the goat of *Azazel*? The *Zohar* represents the King's minister as Satan, who, once called to punish the prince, "was overjoyed, and entered the palace to partake of the banquet." In the parable, the prince asks and receives the King's forgiveness.

"Then the King commanded that a banquet should be prepared for Him and His son, but that the minister should not be told, for, He thought to Himself, should he get wind of the repast which I have ordered for Myself and My son, he will disturb our meal. ...So He called to His chamberlain and said to him: Prepare first a meal for this minister, in order that he may imagine that I am showing him a mark of special favor by giving a banquet in his honor, and so be satisfied and depart, ...so that our joy may be complete and undisturbed...If the King had not dealt thus with his minister, the feast of forgiveness would have been marred."

This decoy banquet in our parable is a means for deceiving Satan on Yom Kippur with the goat for *Azazel* (Satan/*Haman*). The *Zohar* then draws the analogy of Esther's deception of

¹⁹ *Zohar*, Shemoth, *Soncino trans.*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Soncino Press, Judaic Classics Library, 1984), 2:184b-185a.

Haman in inviting him to the wine feast and the function of the goat of *Azazel*. The purpose of this latter goat is to deceive Satan and give him great joy that G*d chose to invite him to His feast, but, says the *Zohar* “little does he realize how the L*rd heaps coals of fire on the heads of him (Satan/*Haman*) and his legions.”

The *Zohar* continues that *Haman*, too, *went out that day joyful and with a glad heart (Megillat Esther 5:9)*” from Esther’s wine feast, drawing the parallel to the portion that “was given him” (Satan), to divert him from the Divine purpose, i.e. to forgive the children of Israel.

“But when the Supernal King comes in to the Matrona [*Shechinah*/Esther], She pleads before the King for Herself, for Her children [*B’nei Yisrael*], for Her people,So Esther said *We are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed...(Megillat Esther 7:4)*....then, *Haman was afraid before the presence of the King and Queen (Megillat Esther 7:6)*. Then radiant looks and perfect joy prevail, and Israel enters into freedom on that day.”

Thus, by using this parable, the *Zohar* draws a clear analogy between Queen Esther appealing to the king, while confronting *Haman* at her second banquet, and the *Shechinah* appealing to the Supernal King on Yom Kippur. The *Zohar*’s parable further serves to recognize the parallels of: Queen Esther with the *Shechinah*, *Haman* to Satan, King *Achashverosh* to The King on High, and Purim to Yom Kippur.

Through the lens of Kabbalah and *Zohar* we see that the *Megillat Esther* is not a simple story of a beauty pageant complicated by the intrigues of the Persian court in a book where G*d’s name is never mentioned once. Rather it is G*d’s message of protection to His people in exile, wherever they are, and however dire their perceived threat. When His people Israel reach out to him in prayer and repentance, and act with courage and bravery, the *Shechinah* will be there to help them to reverse the evil, even when it appears to be established. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the *Megillat Esther* is a timeless book whose messages have relevance to every age in which harsh judgment is allowed to proceed unchecked by the voices of wisdom, mercy, and compassion.

4. The Feminist Lens

1. On an initial reading, the *Megillat Esther* appears to provide feminists with a welcome departure from the largely patriarchal nature of the *Tanach*. Not only is the book named after a woman, but she is the central figure of the story, the one who has made it to the top, and has the courage to risk everything, including her life, to intercede with the king in order to save her people.

Some feminist Bible critics have used the correlation between the stories of Esther and Joseph to assert that women took part in the writing of the Book of Esther. These women rejected the andocentric structure of the earlier Joseph story and recast the savior of the Jews as a woman. They point out that emphasis on the abuses of male power, as well as the fact that the story makes clear Esther's ability for written communication supports this position.

20

2. Both Esther and *Vashti*, are seen as the book's heroines, and pictured by many as exemplary female role models (see 5 and 6 below).

3. A closer feminist reading reveals prominent themes of female subjugation, sexual slavery and abuse, as well as anti-Semitism and violence, in spite of our celebration of Purim as a carnival-like event. Esther, along with all the other beautiful virgins of the kingdom, is forcibly taken from her home by the king's men, to remain in the king's harem for a year until she loses her virginity in one night of sex with the monarch, and waits in his harem to find out if he has further desire for her. *Vashti* is killed for her defiance of the king's desire to display her naked to his drunken male companions, and Esther, even as the queen, must also fear for her life if she has the need to see her husband without his command.

4. Other feminist Bible critics such as Esther Fuchs raise questions as to whether Esther's character significantly departs from the standard patriarchal model. Fuchs asserts that the

²⁰ Klara, Butting, "Esther A New Interpretation of the Joseph Story in The Fight Against Anti-Semitism and Sexism", in *Ruth and Esther*, Brenner, Athalya, ed., trans. Ursula Petruschke, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 239.

omission of G*d's name in this book, whose hero is a woman, emphasizes a "comprehensive biblical policy which allows women characters to hold direct discourse with G*d (or his agent) only in a procreative context". She condemns the text for rewarding female obedience and submissiveness, and portraying women as triumphant only when they use their feminine wiles, being sly and deceptive.²¹ For example the king's requirement of a year long beautification treatment, before a woman can appear before him as a contestant, implies something unattractive about women without artificial enhancement. Other readers, such as Shulamit Reinharz, note the total acceptance of the king's enslavement of young virgins for his sexual pleasure, both by the text and its characters Esther and even Mordecai who does nothing to protect and hide Esther.²² Feminist Bible critics "work to deconstruct the dominant paradigms of biblical interpretation and reconstruct them with a goal of understanding these texts in ways which do not legitimize patriarchal oppression."²³

5. A primary feminist theme in the Book of Esther is the question of where power actually lies, whether with the males, *Achashverosh*, Mordecai and *Haman*, as would seem obvious at first reading, or with the females, Esther and *Vashti*.²⁴ This issue is raised in the very first chapter with *Vashti*'s flat and total refusal to accede to the command of her apparently powerful husband and king to appear naked at the king's drunken banquet. "The strength of her resistance lies in the very absence of a reason for refusing his demand. She doesn't need to have a reason, for she is under no obligation. Her power lies in her freedom to choose for herself....the fact that the issue is not one of legality but of power [is shown] by the king's response [which] is simply one of anger; [which]..can only mean that she has done nothing illegal".²⁵ This has earned her the title of the Bible's first feminist, in the eyes of many. The king's power, as well as that of all men over their wives, is so extremely threatened by the

²¹ Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Reading Ester: Cultural Impact On Responses to Biblical Heroines", Working Paper, (Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University, 2002), 3, <<http://www.brandeis.edu/hbi/pubs/wp9.pdf>>.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴ David J.A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl and Stranley E. Porter; ed., "Reading Esther from Right to Left", *JSOT Sup*, 87; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990, 7, <<http://www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcures/Postmodern1/Estherfns.html>>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

queen's disobedience, that a decree must be issued throughout the kingdom proclaiming that every man should be master of his own house.

6. The issue of power also underlies how the text portrays Esther, although in a much less obvious manner.²⁶ Esther's story is one of growth, from passivity to power. Joshua Berman proposes that unlike *Vashti*, Esther is no radical feminist, but a traditional, obedient young woman.²⁷ She is totally passive when she is taken in a roundup of virgins (Meg. Est. 2:3).

Berman comments that her situation demands obedience and subservience. The king is seeking a wife who will not challenge him as *Vashti* has. Esther, like the other young women, had little choice to be otherwise if she wanted to survive her situation. But unlike the others, Esther seeks no special aids to enhance her beauty, but acquiesces to what is offered.

Esther is described as having become "other", a reflection of what others desire her to be. She is "not only to be treated as an object, but ultimately to submit-in mind and temperament- to becoming an object".²⁸ Berman refers to Simone de Beauvoir, in her characterization of the "other" woman, and asserts that such a woman gains value by casting herself in man's dreams and must repress her spontaneity, and replace it with "studied grace and charm".²⁹ Beauvoir depicts Esther as a victim of circumstances, isolated, dependent and robbed of her ability for moral judgment.³⁰

Berman relates that Esther accomplishes this transformation from an apathetic object to an active director of events in small steps, each success feeding the next until her goals are achieved. In order to comply with Mordecai's demand that she reveal herself as a Jew, Esther must cast off her "otherness", and reclaim her identity. Studies indicate that there is a direct correlation between concealment of one's identity and low self esteem.³¹ Esther,

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Joshua Berman, "Hadassah bat Abihail", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 120, 4, (2001), 649.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 651.

³¹ Ibid., 653.

whose sense of self has already been severely eroded by her five years as queen, in addition to concealing her heritage, must garner the inner resources to accede to Mordecai's demand. Unlike Mordecai, who expresses optimism about the success of Esther's mission, she takes a much more pessimistic view saying "if I am to perish, I shall perish".³²

Esther's calling for a three day fast by the Jews of *Shushan*, in which she and her maid servants will join, is seen by Berman as her first step in regaining her identity and "coming out" as a Jew, since fasting was a well established Biblical tradition in the face of impending doom.³³ In this way she is able, within the security of her inner circle to acknowledge her Judaism, feel solidarity with her people, and yet publicly remain as the queen of Persia.

Esther is anxious about going to see the king unbidden (Meg. Est. 4:11), because, even as the queen she is as powerless as any other woman, before her master. However, she has grown stronger and so she is able to challenge the king's law, unlike *Vashti*, because she is respectful rather than defiant, and is accepted into the king's presence. Despite being welcomed into the king's presence, Esther is not yet ready to declare herself. She only asks that he attend a drinking banquet she has prepared to honor him; a wish he is easily able to grant. And even with his attendance at the first banquet, although he offers to grant whatever she desires, it is still only a dress rehearsal, and she requests that both he and *Haman* attend a second party the next day.

Finally, the day of reckoning comes. The king has stated that he would give her whatever she requests, but how will she win his sympathy? Rather than coming out and saying proudly, I am a Jew and the Jews are your loyal subjects, she realizes that the key to her success will be to maintain her respectful and compliant "other" status by saying "If I have found favor in your sight, Oh king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request".³⁴

³² Ibid., 655.

³³ Ibid., 656.

³⁴ Ibid., 662.

While Esther partly achieves her goal with *Haman*'s execution, the king says nothing to indicate that he would revoke the decree against the Jews. What does this say to Esther in regard to her Jewishness; has she been accepted as a Jew or is her religion merely tolerated and excused? She has not spoken on behalf of the Jewish people by name, and presented them only as an extension of herself.

But here the king surprisingly responds to her not as a female, but as a Jew. He speaks jointly to both Esther and Mordecai, empowering them to proceed as they see fit, giving permission for the Jewish people to resist the attacks of their enemies. Only Mordecai takes advantage of this edict, sending out communiqués and taking to the streets of *Shushan*. Esther remains behind the palace walls, once again retreating to her position as queen, rather than Jewess.

In the concluding chapter of the book, nine months later, Esther makes two requests of the king; that the Jews of *Shushan* be granted an additional day to pursue their enemies, and that *Haman*'s sons be publicly impaled. She no longer speaks of “her people” but proudly of the “Jews of *Shushan*”. Esther's final action, the only time in the story where she reaches beyond the palace, is to join Mordecai in a communiqué which she signs Esther bat Abihail, the name she shed when becoming queen. She has finally shed her “otherness”, reclaiming her identity both as an individual and as a Jew.³⁵

5. The Lens of Anti-Semitism

A. *Amalek* and Antisemitism

The Shabbat before Purim is called *Shabbat Zachor* because we read the *Maftir* Torah portion from Deut. 25:17-19, which begins with the word *zachor*, remember.

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם:

Remember what *Amalek* did to you by the way, when you came forth out of Egypt;

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 668.

אשר קרך בדרך ויזנב בך כל־הנחשלים אחריך ואתה עיף ויגע ולא ירא אלהים:

How he met you by the way, and struck at your rear, all who were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God.

והיה בהניח יהוה אלהיך לך מכל־איביך מסביב בארץ אשר יהוה־אלהיך נתן לך נחלה לרשתה תמחה את־זכר עמלק מתחת השמים לא תשכח:

Therefore it will be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around, in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess, that you shall blot out the remembrance of *Amalek* from under heaven; you will not forget.

From these verses that we read before Purim, we learn that *Amalek* represents a calculating evil which doesn't meet his perceived enemy head on, but strikes at the feeble in the rear. *Amalek* doesn't spend his strength fighting a strong enemy, rather he attempts to psychologically harm his enemy by slaughtering the lame, the sick, the weak, the very young and the very old, i.e. *Amalek* strikes swiftly at the weak in order to produce, among the strong, a sense of frustration, failure and emotional suffering that they could not save their loved ones.

Similarly, from the account in Exodus 17:8-16, it appears that only after Israel was faint and weary, having little water to drink, and murmuring against Moses and the L*rd at *Rephidim*, does the text tell us that *Amalek* attacked Israel. In her commentary on the Torah's two texts of *Amalek*, Nechama Leibowitz proposes that "the criterion of G*d fearingness....may be measured by the attitude of the subject to the weak and the stranger. Where the fear of G*d is lacking, the stranger who is homeless in a foreign land is liable to be murdered.....This is evidently the reason why we were commanded to blot out the memory of *Amalek*, since they came and fell upon the defenseless and weary without any pretext whatsoever. The Children of Israel where not entering their territory and it was purely a wanton attack."³⁶

³⁶ Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim*, trans. Aryeh Newman, (Jerusalem: The World Zionist Organization, 1980), 252-253.

Jewish tradition traces the generations of *Amalek* back from the incident with Moses and Joshua to Esau's son *Eliphaz*, whose concubine, *Timna*, sister of *Lotan*, a chief of the land of *Seir* (Gen. 36:22), gave birth to *Amalek* (Gen. 36:12). So we can picture that *Amalek* was raised in the constant presence of his grandfather Esau's hatred for his brother Jacob. Tradition also traces *Amalek* forward to *Agag*, King of the *Amalekites* of whom we read about in the Haftarah for *Shabbat Zachor* (1 Samuel 15:1-34). The Book of Esther continues extending the generations of Esau's grandson *Amalek* to *Haman* through *Hammedatha* the *Agagite* (Meg. Est. 3:1). But why does the Torah say you "shall blot out the remembrance of *Amalek* from under heaven"? Are we to understand that the *Amalekites* still exist today? Didn't the book of Exodus tell us they were slaughtered by Joshua, and the Book of Judges relate that Saul and Samuel again slaughtered them, and finally the Book of Esther asserted that the Jews of Persia slaughtered their enemies, defending themselves?

Nechama Leibowitz concludes from the Torah's text, that *Amalek*... "is not any more an ethnic or racial concept but is the archetype of the wanton aggressor who smites the weak and defenseless in every generation."³⁷ In this view, we do not need a genetic tree to discover *Amalek*, for they are not a race of people, but a human personality type which constantly appears in every generation of man, seething with racial prejudice to the point of acting upon their hatred.

And what of peoples who actively enlist and encourage suicide murderers? Who dress as innocents, concealing their weapons and slaughter not the armed soldiers, but the women and children, the old and the innocent unaware civilian? Peoples who do not "fear" that they will incur G*d's anger, since the hatred and prejudice they have been brought up to feel teaches them the righteousness of their cause. Are they then, "freedom fighters", as the press would have all believe, or are they the *Amalekites* of our generation? Are they the peoples of *Haman*, attempting to carry out racial extermination, while instilling a sense of frustration, failure and deep emotional suffering?

B. Powerlessness and Anti-Semitism.

³⁷ Ibid., 253.

Anti-Semitism is closely allied and intertwined with the themes of powerlessness and sexism which permeates the *Megillat Esther*. This is not surprising as we find both functions of the abuse of power similarly linked in any number of societies, even today. It is commonly accepted that the *Megillah* was read, at one time, as a “how to guide”, for both physical and spiritual survival for Jews living in the Diaspora. The power of the work comes not from its factual history, but from its emotionally charged portrayal of a threatened people—represented by Esther, “one quadrupally disadvantaged individual – a woman, an orphan, a Jew and a captive in the king’s court”³⁸.

Biblical critic Jon Douglas Levenson (“*Esther; A Commentary*”, Westminster: John Knox Press (1977) p. 54) points out the similarities between Esther’s personal history and that of Israel. Israel had neither land nor king and was forced to live within a foreign society. Similarly Esther is without parents and must take refuge with relatives. Like the Jewish people, caught within the politics of the dominant society she struggles to survive. Sidnie Ann White (Crawford) emphasizes how Esther is a symbolic representation of the Jewish people.

“The fact that she is a woman emphasizes the plight of the Jews in the Diaspora: the once-powerful Jewish nation has become a subordinate minority within a foreign empire, just as Esther, as a woman, is subject to the dominant male. However, by accepting the reality of a subordinate position and learning to gain power by working within the structure rather than against it, the Jew can build a successful and fulfilling life in the Diaspora as Esther does in the court of Ahasueros”.³⁹

Sylvia Fishman gives numerous examples of how between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, rabbis living in Spain, Italy, France and Morocco, very much equated Esther’s situation in the Persian court with the dangers faced in their own situations. The rabbis of medieval Europe viewed Esther, in a “gender-neutral mode”, as the ideal of how a subject should use clever strategy to achieve difficult goals, in other words, as a model of the “consummate politician”.⁴⁰

³⁸ Fishman, 10.

³⁹ Sidnie Ann White, “*Esther: A Feminine Model for the Jewish Diaspora*”, *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, Day, Peggy L. ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 161-177.

⁴⁰ Fishman, 5.

The existence of widespread anti-Semitism in the Persian Empire during the period in which the story takes place, clearly underlies the actions of Esther and Mordecai in hiding their ethnicity and only revealing their Jewishness when absolutely necessary.⁴¹ The fact that the servants run to *Haman* only when Mordecai reveals his Jewish origins, but not initially when he first refuses to bow to *Haman*, indicates the prevalence of wide spread anti-Jewish sentiment.⁴² *Haman*'s reaction is to Mordecai as a Jew, rather than as an individual, resulting in his edict against all Jews. This further underscores the anti-Semitic climate.

This is not surprising given the religious differences between the Jews and their polytheistic neighbors.⁴³ *Haman* complains to the king, that the laws of the Jews are different from those of any other people, and that they do not obey the king's laws (Meg. Est. 3:8). The *Megillah* makes no attempt to deny this. If one must choose between the king's law and G*d's law, the choice is self evident. Absolute commitment to G*d is Judaism's core. "If Jewish survival in the Diaspora were genuinely dependent on absolute and sole commitment to the law of the land, the Diaspora community would be doomed from the start."⁴⁴

Haman planned to capitalize on the common people's hatred for the Jews. Rather than use the imperial army, *Haman* relies upon the common man to express this hatred through violence.⁴⁵ He sets the date of this execution, eleven months ahead, from the 13th of Nissan to the 13th of Adar, giving plenty of time for anti-Jewish feelings to fester and grow. And even *Haman*'s death does nothing to quell the violence and the Jews have to defend themselves against their enemies.⁴⁶

The Christian approach to the Book of Esther has been dramatically different than Jewish readings. Jews tend to love Esther and Israel's triumph, while Christians either read it with

⁴¹ Joseph Fleishman, "Why Did Ahasuerus Consent To Annihilate The Jews?", *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 25, 2, (1999), 44-46.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁴ Berel Dov Lerner, "No Happy Endings for Esther", *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 29, 1, (2001), 7.

⁴⁵ Fleishman, 48.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

“great distaste”, just tolerate it, or as in the case of the anti-Semitic Martin Luther, dismiss the Book entirely⁴⁷.

Greenstein recognizes that “Jews have read into the story of Esther and Mordecai a paradigm of their people’s vulnerability to racist hatred.”⁴⁸ He remarks that I. B. Singer commented on the threat of *Haman’s* decree in the *Megillat Esther* as “a near Holocaust”.⁴⁹ Greenstein sees the design and function of the Book of Esther, which comprises the major scriptural text read aloud in the synagogue twice on Purim, during this feast of jesting and revelry, to “temporarily each year relieve some of the burden of being Jewish in a hostile or potentially hostile environment”⁵⁰. It is clear that this story has served for two millennia to remind us of the anti-Semitic currents lying buried, sometimes hidden well beneath the surface, but at other times staring at us like an open festering wound that we must daily accommodate to survive in our exilic world, in the *galut*.

6. Hippuch, The Lens of Reversal.

Hippuch, or reversal/upheaval, has often been seen as “the characteristic feature” of Purim as opposed to the other holidays of the cycle of the Jewish year. This “feature” of reversal has several major aspects.

A. Comic Sense of *Hippuch* Emphasized Through Jewish Traditional Ritual.

Normally a Jewish congregation would follow the recitation of a scriptural reading by the reader in a *Chumash* or book of readings, listening quietly and carefully to the words, or studying the commentaries in the *Chumash*. On Purim, during the reading of the *Megillah*, we are required by tradition to listen carefully so that we may interrupt with noise to drown out the sound of *Haman’s* name. We would never do this for any other scriptural recitation. The ritual setting is opposite the intense study and quiet expected for a reading of scripture.

⁴⁷ Edward Greenstein, “A Jewish Reading of Esther”, Jacob Neusner, ed., *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, (1987), 225.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The ritual purposefully overturns the decorum to allow for the fulfillment of the commandment to remember to wipe out *Haman's* name. This permits a comic portrayal of anti-Semitism and relieves the pressure of its constant presence in the life of the Jew in exile. Similarly, traditional ritual instructs us to drink, *ad lo yadah*, until we cannot recognize the difference between the sound of *Haman's* and *Mordecai's* names, and this is quite drunk. It places us in a state not unlike king *Achashverosh* at his wine parties, where joviality is increased, moral judgment is impaired, and the differences between opposites blur together. This may serve to blur the lines of *Mordecai's* and *Haman's* personalities into the single unified vision of *Shneur Zalman* of Lyady (see above Kabbalistic lens). This state of inebriation also adds to the sense of comic buffoonery developed by the highly unlikely superimposition of plot events throughout the *Megillah*.

Ritual practice also encourages the use of masks and costumes of gender switching which add further to the sense of burlesque reversal and carnival atmosphere. Other elements of the plot add to the comic sense of *hippuch*. For example, a beauty contest where the main judging event was one night in bed with the king. Similarly the event which caused a vacancy in the office of queen, was *Vashti's* refusal to appear nude to have her sexual attractiveness judged by the inebriated guests at the king's drinking fest. Perhaps the most comic and enjoyable reversal is the presence of *Haman* in the king's courtyard. He had come to get the king's permission to rid himself of *Mordecai* on the gallows that he constructed. But, by his self aggrandizing answers to the king's questions, *Haman* finds himself not paraded high on the king's horse through town but degraded as a lowly servant on foot, drawing the horse and serving to raise his hated enemy *Mordecai* to high honor.

B. *Hippuch* as Evidence of G*d's Hand Behind the Scenes.

Hippuch begins when *Haman* appears in the king's court late at night to ask the king for permission to hang *Mordecai* the next day; but due to his presence at that critical time when the hidden unrewarded deed was discovered, *Haman* was forced to become the hand that lifted up *Mordecai*, instead of hanging him, analogous to how *Bilam* came to curse *Bnai Yisrael*, but G*d reversed his curse and there was substituted on his lips only a vision of

⁵⁰ Ibid, 233.

blessing. Thus the evil which *Haman* planned to execute upon Mordecai, was executed upon *Haman* in justice. What brought about the *hippuch*, the reversal of fate of the Jews of Persia? The cause was Esther's bravery, courage and compassion for her people. Going before the king without being summoned was punishable by Death, even for the queen. Thus we can see that *hippuch* began the very next night after Queen Esther approached the king, for that very next night the king wasn't able to sleep and so uncovered the fact that Mordecai had never been rewarded for having saved the king's life.

This marked the beginning of the *hippuch*/overturning of the dire fate of the Jews of Persia and its replacement with one of happiness and joy. King *Achashverosh* first gave his ring to *Haman* to permit great evil, and later reversed himself and gave it to Mordecai to prevent the slaughter of Jews and allow them instead to destroy their enemies forever. Further, the decree issued by *Haman* could only be overturned and remedied on the same day that *Haman* chose to propagate the evil upon the Jews. This too is characteristic of *hippuch*.

C. *Hippuch* Reflecting Unexpected Changes in Fate of the Jews in Exile.

Throughout our two millennia of exile, great misfortunes occurred to us, and often only a few had the insight or the opportunity to escape these external evils. Yet these periods of misfortune often alternated with periods of blessed calm and even an occasional golden age. Our being aware that the winds of fate often change rapidly, can prepare us to have a plan for our survival.

D. *Hippuch* as the Overthrowing of Winter and the Beginning of Spring.

The early spring weather is famous for its rapid reversals from bitter to beautiful and back again. Winter is fighting to keep its hold, but spring is becoming ever more successful at overthrowing the cruel conditions of winter, at least for a day or two. The *hippuch* of Purim tells us that spring is coming, but warns us not to put away that snow shovel just yet. We just might need it again sometime soon!

III. Birchot HaShachar Service.

Let us try to envision our prayers this *Shabbat Zachor* in terms of the themes from the *Megillat Esther*; to aid you, we will recall relevant aspects of text and plot of this story of Purim. We will attempt to connect with the characters of *Megillat Esther*, their emotions, their needs, and consequently their possible silent prayers to G*d, though never explicitly stated in our text. Since the *Megillat Esther* is set in the diaspora of Persia rather than the land of Israel, its teachings and the prayers of its Jewish characters should directly relate, at times, to us, who are also a generation of the Jews of the diaspora. More importantly for us this morning, we will see that the converse is also true, that through our daily prayers, we should be able, if we try, to envision and relate to the prayers of that generation of Jews in Persia. Let us in this way, use the eternal aspects of prayer to tie us, to G*d, as well as to the unspoken prayers of the Jews of the *Megillat Esther*. In the process we will see that Jewish prayer expresses eternal themes which are, and have been part of the Life story of every Jew.

Please turn to page 2 of your Sim Shalom *siddur*⁵¹ and let's begin with this song of thanks, which we will sing to the melody of Debbie Friedman:

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, שֶׁהַחֲזוֹרָת בִּי נִשְׁמַתִּי בַחֲמֵלָה רַבָּה אֲמוּנָתְךָ;

I thank you Oh living and eternal King, for you have restored to me my soul-breath in your great compassion and in faithfulness.

Each morning on awakening, we thank G*d for our breath, the soul of life. Picture yourself as a Jew living in the capitol of Persia at the time of *Haman*'s official decree from the crown, giving the Jew haters, among the Persians by royal decree, encouragement to slaughter the Jews. Or for that matter, imagine yourself trapped in Nazi controlled Europe, and through the help of some compassionate official you were able to obtain a passport to Shanghai, Argentina, or Switzerland. This prayer of thanks for restoring your life, might very well have new meaning for you as you recited its words after being given back your life. When we sing this prayer of thanks to G*d, using Debbie Friedman's melody, we repeat the phrase "I thank you", 3 times, and "for you have returned to me my soul /(breath) in compassion". Esther and the Jews of Persia, also prayed and fasted 3 times, i.e. for 3 days before Esther bravely appeared unannounced before the King. We feel and recognize that

⁵¹ Jules Harlow; ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom*, (New York, The Rabbinical Assembly, 1985), 2.

she too might have recited this prayer, after the King greeted her with acceptance in spite of the possible death that might have awaited her. Like Esther, someone who has survived or recovered from a life-threatening event, illness or surgery can often envision each day as a gift from G*d, not to be taken for granted, but being grateful and giving thanks for the precious gift of life [(this prayer of thanksgiving to G*d for our life breath, emphasizes that, in this sense, we all stand in their shoes). Similarly, we recall that the prayer recounting the miracles of G*d's salvation, the *Al Hanisim* prayer on Purim and Chanukah, comes in the (*Hoda'ah*) thanksgiving, prayer section of the *Amidah* (Shabbat 24a, first found in the 9th century *Siddur* of Rav Amram Gaon). This emphasizes, yet again, that in the presence of G*d's salvation in our lives, we must remember to give thanks.

ראשית חכמה יראת ה', שכל טוב לכל עשיהם

The dawning/beginning of wisdom, is the awe/fear of the L*rd,
(providing) a rich/clear understanding/perception to all who seek/do it.

Esther's decision to take upon herself her Jewish responsibility to G*d and *B'nei Yisrael*, to help save their lives, marked the dawn of her transformation from a simple beauty queen into a mature caring person, an insightful, beneficent ruler, and the protector of her people. Her decision gave birth to an active plan of salvation, beginning with 72 hours of prayer and fasting to the L*rd. Through her brave actions, her self sacrifice, and the stirring up of her people to prayer, she kindled the spark for the intervention of G*d's light into her life and into the lives of her people, resulting in the end of darkness and suffering and the beginning of light and joy for the Jews of Persia

ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה

In everyone's life there are times when shock and grief, confusion and disbelief paralyze us. At those times, we too, like Esther, need the spark of hope, and prayer to support us through the blackness of our shock; to bring the first rays of light to help us deal with today, and slowly, step by step, to begin to plan for a future tomorrow.

מה טובו אהליך יעקב, משכנתיך ישראל.

How beautiful are your tents Oh Jacob, your sanctuaries Oh Israel.

This first line of a poem of pastoral praise for the beauty and holiness of *Bnei Yisrael* was made by the nonJewish prophet Bilaam, who came to the peak of a mountain overlooking the camp of Israel below, so that he could curse Israel and receive a great reward from Balak the king of Moab. But G*d turned his attempted curse into a blessing of great pastoral beauty, holiness, kingship, and power. Bilaam had hoped to accomplish the down-throw of Israel through his offerings of 7 bulls and 7 rams upon 7 altars on this mountain top, but G*d overturned/*haphach* Bilaam's evil curse and transformed it into a Divine vision of everlasting beauty and blessing. This Divine blessing in *Bamidbar* 24:5 is so important that a *sofer* writing the Torah inscribes it as the very first verse in its column of the Torah (like the peak of a mountain), making it one of only five columns of the entire Torah not beginning with a vav. The columns of the Torah were like the richly colored curtains of the *Mishkan*, the holy Tabernacle in the wilderness, all connected one to another and suspended by the *vavei ha-amudim* (hooks of the pillars). However, there were five special openings to holiness, where there were no *vavim*, but rather, verses representative of Judaism's foundational or covenantal relationships between Yisrael and her G*d. Such a holy entrance to the Tabernacle is this image of praise placed by the Divine into the eyes and mouth of one who sought for G*d to curse His people.

Purim is the major Jewish holiday where this theme of overturning/*hippuch* is repeated time and time again. So much so, that *hippuch* is a major element of ritual obligation for the holiday. Where congregational scriptural reading is generally done in silence and with congregation study, the *Megillah* reading, the central feature of Purim, is almost constantly interrupted with noise of every kind to drown out the name of *Haman*, and we are expected to be so inebriated with drink during the reading that we cannot distinguish between the names of *Haman* and Mordecai. The parallel to Bilaam's attempted curse of Israel, is *Haman's* decree of hatred encouraging the populace to rise and slaughter the Jews of Persia. G*d overthrew Bilaam's attempted curse when Israel was in the wilderness, but even when they are in exile, *Haman's* decree is overturned for blessing by Mordecai's decree to allow the Jews to destroy all the anti-Semites who rise up against them. This reversal of evil for good in scripture is called *hippuch*, and is evidence of G*d's divine benevolent intervention.

ואני, תפלתי לך יי, עת רצון, אלהים ברב חסדך, ענני באמת ישעך.

May my prayer to you, Oh L*rd, be received favorably, Oh G*d in Your great loving kindness, answer me with the truth of your salvation (*Tehilim* 69:14).

We can picture Esther praying, fasting and readying herself for her appearance in her garment of *Malchut*, of Queenship, of the *Shechinah*, before king *Achashverosh*, but most important, before the King on high. It is this brave act of Esther's which causes G*d to overturn the evil and replace it with blessing. Esther prays for herself and her people that their prayers will be received and they will be saved. We too, as rabbis, pray daily for our people, praying for their health and their very lives. We, like Esther, pray that these prayers will be answered and that our people will receive healing and recover from their serious, sometimes life-threatening illnesses.

Prayers for putting on the Tallit (*Tinatsel Nafshi* and *Barchi Nafshi* (Ps. 104:1-2)).

In a traditional *Siddur*,⁵² before putting on the *Tallit*, and after Psalm 104 is the prayer whose *dibbur hamatchil*, introductory words, are הרניי מתעטף גופי בציצת . This prayer emphasizes the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah by which we and of course Mordecai and the Jews of Persia are made holy and set apart as G*d's people. This brings to mind a pivotal account in the *Megillat Esther* that Mordecai refused to kneel and prostrate himself in obeisance before the prime/chief minister *Haman*, though all the king's servants were required to do so. Mordecai refused, giving as his reason that he was a Jew, when *Haman* was told this, he was infuriated with hatred for Mordecai and decided to annihilate all the Jews of Persia. (Meg. Est. 3:2-6) Rashi says that *Haman* made himself a god and therefore Mordecai refused to bow before him.⁵³ The *midrash* describes that *Haman* embroidered an image on his garments and when the people bowed to him, they were worshipping the god of

⁵² Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Siddur Kol Ya'akov; The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1984), 4.

⁵³ Rashi on the words *kor'im umishtachavim*, in Meg. Est. 3:2, see also Rashi on the words *ne'evad k'haman* in Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 61b.

the image on his garments.⁵⁴ Mordecai's refusal to pay obeisance to *Haman* was required by three negative *mitzvot* of the Torah (see the "Taryag" of *Rambam*).⁵⁵ These negative *mitzvot* are: 1. Do not consider the possibility of another divinity besides the L*rd ["you shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:13)]; 2. Do not bow down to any false gods even if bowing to them is not generally (a sign of) worshipping them (Ex. 20:13); and 3. Do not worship false gods with types of service which is customary used to worship them ["do not serve them" Ex 20:3].

Our commandments set us apart as an עַם קְדוֹשׁ, a holy people before G*d. If Mordecai had bowed down in worship to *Haman* and his images, he would have violated these important negative commandments of the Torah and thus committed a great sin before G*d. Today is *Shabbat Zachor*, the Shabbat of Remembrance of the attack of the *Amalekites* upon the children of Israel when they were weary and traveling the road leaving Egypt (Deu. 25:17-19). We are also reminded through the haftarah for *Shabbat Zachor* (1Sam. 15: 1-34) that Agag, the King of the *Amalekites*, was an ancestor of *Haman* (Meg. Est. 3:1). In the face of this evil we take particular note of Mordecai's example, that even in the face of coercion, we must follow the commandments of the Torah, of which the *Tsitsit* are a sign for us. In this prayer we say:

תנצל נפשי ורוחי ונשמתי ותפלתי מן החיצונים, והטלית יפרוש כנפיו עליהם
ויצילם פנשר יעיר קנו על גוזליו.

"May my soul (the 3 levels of the soul, *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*) and my prayer be delivered from outside (negative influences); And may the *Tallit* spread its wings over them and deliver them like an eagle who stirs up her nest and hovers over her young".

As we read these words of prayer, we can also feel Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews of Persia, praying this prayer to G*d for protection from all external evil forces, particularly the destruction decreed by *Haman*. We envision that the intrinsic holiness of the garment of the *Tallit* shields us by virtue of the *Tsitsit*, whose holiness is drawn from the Kedusha of the

⁵⁴ *Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer*, perek 49.

⁵⁵ *Rambam*, *Sefer HaMitzvot*, *Mitzvot Lo Ta'aseh* 1, 5, and 6.

Torah's commandments (G*d's words). When we put on our *Tallit* we are also protected by the holiness of "the *Tallit* of G*d on high" i.e. G*d's *Tallit* of light. For the verse here in our prayer books (Ps. 104: 1-2) states "you have robed yourself with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light like a garment, spreading out the heavens like a curtain." Therefore our physical *Tallit* is our spiritual connection with G*d's holy garment, which is like the light of the heavens, protecting us from evil influences. In many ways, Esther, when she commits herself to saving the lives of her people, takes upon herself divine aspects of the *Shechinah* (see above Kabbalistic Lens, section on Esther). She becomes the instrument of the *Tallit* of G*d, the "Eagle, who stirs up her" people with their fast for her, and, with G*d's help, "hovers over" them to provide them with protection. Think of those people in your life, who, like the *Shechinah*, hovered over you to protect you, or guided you, or who stirred you from your lethargy to awaken you to action. There have been so many such caring people in all our lives, whether parents, relatives, mentors, teachers or good concerned friends. With this image of the *Shechinah* present in your life, let us sing the song "*Tallit*", which uses the words of this prayer *Tinatsel Nafshi*.⁵⁶

The meditation:

הַנְּנִי מְכוּזָּן בְּהִנָּחַת תְּפִילִין לְקִיּוֹם מִצְוַת בּוֹרְאֵי... עַל הַיָּד, לְזִכְרוֹן זְרוּעַ הַנְּטוּיָה,
וְשֶׁהִיא נִגָּד הַלֵּב, לְשַׁעֲבֵד בְּזֶה תַּאֲוֹת וּמַחְשָׁבוֹת לְבַנּוּ לְעִבּוֹדָתוֹ.

"Behold my intention/(I intend) by putting on the *Tefillin* to fulfill the command of my Creator.....[to bind] upon the hand as a remembrance of The (Holy) outstretched arm, and that it should be opposite the heart to indicate our duty to subjugate the animal desires of our heart to His Divine Service.."

As it is written in the Torah (Ex. 13:9):

"And it shall be for a sign to you upon your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes, that the Torah of the L*rd may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand has the Lord brought you out of Egypt."

Just as the *Tallit* is a protection against external evil, the *Tefillin* is a protection against internal sinful thoughts and desires. *Haman* had no check over his thoughts of lust for

⁵⁶ P. Don, "Tallit", in *The Best of the Chassidic Song Festivals*, Velvel Pasternak ed. (Cedarhurst, N.Y.: Tara Publications, 1989), 26.

power and hatred for Mordecai. This drove him to legalize genocide without misgivings or pangs of conscience. When we fulfill the commandment to wear the *Tsitsit* and the *Tefillin*, we remind ourselves: of our obligations to G*d and our fellow man, of the need to keep our desires under control, and of the importance of raising the level of Divine consciousness in the world.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר נתן לשכוי בינה, להבחין בין יום
ובין לילה:

Blessed is Hashem, King of the universe who has given the rooster/heart
the ability to discern between day and night.

We associate day with light, and night with darkness. While we all claim to know the difference between day and night, we don't always correctly perceive the difference between right and wrong, goodness and evil. King *Achashverosh* often mistook an evil proposal of his advisors for a good and correct one. His discernment was poor, he rarely foresaw the ultimate impact of his rulings and edicts upon his kingdom. We too do not always foresee the impact of our decisions upon either our own lives, or the lives of others. We ask G*d to help us to find the wisdom of Binah, discernment, so that we may make our choices in life, motivated not by immediate gain, but by maximizing long lasting benefit to all who are affected by our choices.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, שעשני בצלמו:

Blessed is Hashem King of the universe who has made me in His image.

What is that image? It is the invisible image of man's soul, as scripture says, the soul of man is the candle of Hashem (Prov. 20:27). We contrast this invisible Divine image of the soul with the physical "image" that *Haman* wore so that all would worship and bow down to him (see discussion above on the meditation מתעטף הרני before putting on the *Tallit*). Don't we, sometimes, also seek after physical images, the material possessions of our world, choosing too often, to ignore, rather than to recognize, the intrinsic divinity of the souls of others, in dire need?

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, שעשני ישראל:

Blessed is Hashem King of the universe who has made me a Jew.

In this prayer we refer to a Jew as Yisrael i.e. from Jacob/Israel. When we call ourselves Israelites we connect ourselves with the Holy Land given to us by G*d, to the people of that Land, and to its spiritual history recorded in the Torah. However, in the *Megillat Esther*, a Jew is always referred to as a *Yehudi*, from Judea, never as an Israelite. The Talmud explains that “whoever repudiates idolatry is called a *Yehudi*,”⁵⁷ because Yehudah’s name was meant to incorporate the letters of G*d’s Holy Name.⁵⁸

שכל הכופר בעבודה זרה נקרא יהודי

In essence, then, to call ourselves *Yehudim* is also to remind ourselves of our soul’s connection to the L*rd G*d.

In recognition that the original formulation of this prayer was “Blessed is Hashem King of the universe who has not made me a woman”⁵⁹, we egalitarian Jews note this change with satisfaction and are particularly aware of the pre-eminence of Esther, the chief heroic figure of the Book that bears her name. She is a figure not only of great beauty, grace, and tact, but also of great courage, faith and compassion for her people. In addition to, or perhaps because of this, Esther is also a symbol of G*d’s Holy *Shechinah*, bringing evil under control, and acting to reverse injustice.

A feminist approach to the old formulation of this prayer would reflect the reverberations of this theme with the themes of female subjugation, sexual slavery and abuse, which the Book of Esther reveals (see Feminist lens 3 above).

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, שעשני בן חורין:

Blessed is Hashem King of the universe who has made me a free man.

⁵⁷ Talmud Bavli, Megillah 13a.

⁵⁸ Talmud Bavli, Sota 10b.

⁵⁹ *Siddur Kol Ya'akov; The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, 18.

However, the traditional blessing reads ... “who has not made me a slave”.⁶⁰ A slave has no free-will and his life may be bought and sold at the whim of his master, much as the King of Persia allowed *Haman* to have the Jews of Persia destroyed for the price of 10,000 talents of silver. G*d desires man to be free. Does my status as a free person come with a responsibility to help those who are still caught in the net of slavery or subject to genocide?

The Hebrew term *ben chorin*, reminds us of its plural *bnei chorin*, which we read in the *Haggadah shel Pesach*, in the *Ha Lachmah Anyah*, and which we sing at the Pesach seder in the song *Avadim Hayinu*. This holiday of freedom which follows Purim is connected to the story of Joseph in the *Tanach*, because Joseph brings the children of Israel into Egypt, where they are later enslaved after Joseph’s death. By the many and strong connections of the story of Joseph to the Book of Esther, Purim becomes not only an exilic story of G*d’s redemption, but also a prequel holiday to Pesach, the holiday celebrating G*d’s taking us out of *Mitzrayim*.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, פוקח עורים:

Blessed is Hashem, King of the universe, who opens (the eyes) of the blind.

Just so did Hashem cause King *Achashverosh* to open his sleepless eyes and discover what he had been blind to, i.e. that Mordecai had saved his life and had never been rewarded. Like *Achashverosh*, who was given insight by G*d’s awakening him, there are times when each of us has a sudden flash of understanding, when loose ends suddenly come together to open our eyes to insight, or when lost knowledge is found. How wonderful this is when we can see this as a blessing in our lives.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, מלביש ערמים:

Blessed is Hashem, King of the universe, who clothes the naked.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Similarly the clothes of Esther and Mordecai are changed from sackcloth to royal garments. All the Jews were naked before *Haman's* edict of destruction, but Esther's bravery lit the flame of G*d's compassion upon Esther and her people, and G*d helped to overturn the evil decree against them, thus they became clothed in the royal robes of G*d's protection. Haven't we all felt, at least once, small, defenseless, and in a sense naked when we appeared before someone, or some group of authority? Only later do we occasionally realize that we, in a sense wear the same clothing, we are all alike, both king and janitor, all of us share the human bond of flesh and blood, and all of us share the divine bond of the spark of G*d. We all will suffer the limitations of human suffering, and we all can spiritually reach for the stars.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, מתיר אסורים:

Blessed is Hashem, King of the universe, who releases the bound.

One image that comes to mind, is that of Esther who was taken from her home and, in a sense, bound into a non-Jewish world. It was not until she embraced her Jewish responsibility to her people that she found true release from her bonds. We too sometimes find ourselves in difficult situations in which we feel imprisoned. However, when we deal with the situation in a way which allows our inner self to be expressed, we embrace our problems, deal honestly with our conflicted selves, and find release from our own chains.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, זוקף כפופים:

Blessed is Hashem, King of the universe, who raises up the bent.

Haman wanted to bend all the Persians to his will, when Mordecai the Jew would not bow before him, in his hatred he sought to bring low all the Jews. Through the courage and cleverness of Esther and Mordecai, G*d raised up his people, and brought *Haman* and the other Persian anti-Semites low. So too, when depression weighs us down, faith and courage can go a long way to help us begin to stand up straight again.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, רוקע הארץ על המים:

Blessed is Hashem who spreads the land over the waters.

We are used to seeing rain fall as water upon the ground, making the surface slippery and unsteady for walking or riding. The unlikely reversal of this state, i.e. spreading dry land over the waters, or making the slippery, steady and sure, for example, as in the splitting of the sea, we must attribute to the intervention of G*d. In the *Megillat Esther*, the survival of the Jews of Persia seems very unsure and even unlikely, until Queen Esther reveals her hidden Jewishness to the king. Only then is evil controlled and vanquished by loving kindness, and does G*d intervene to make secure what was perilous. Then the evil *Haman* falters and slips underfoot, and what began as his quick, sure rise to power, turns into its opposite, a slipping into powerlessness and his rapid demise. Just as the Jews of Persia were saved from disaster, we too should never give up hope. This is the famous advice of Reb Nachman of Bratislov. “Never despair! Never! It is forbidden to give up hope.”⁶¹ What now appears insecure and perilous, may, with our best efforts and the grace of G*d, change, in the near future, to our favor.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, שעשה לי כל צרכי:

Blessed is Hashem who has provided for me all my needs.

Our most basic needs, from today's perspective, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Anti-Semitism, perhaps the most basic theme of the *Megillat Esther*, is just a narrow name for racism. We cannot sit back and ignore the violence and hatred sown by racism in the world today when it takes away not only our pursuit of happiness, but also our life and liberty. However, we must also take great care that our zeal to remove violence and racism does not itself produce racism and counsel violence.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם המכין מצערי גבר:

Blessed is Hashem who guides the steps of man.

⁶¹ Moshe Mykoff, *The Empty Chair, Timeless Wisdom From a Hasidic Master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*, (Jewish Lights: Woodstock, Vermont, 2001), 110.

In the *Megillat Esther*, there is no direct reference to G*d, and His name is completely missing from this Book of the Bible. Yet for one of faith who reads this book, each event of the plot that places Esther and Mordecai in positions where they are able to intervene to avert the destruction of their people, is evidence of G*d's guidance. For most of us, it is only when we take the time to reflect back upon our lives that we see revealed the hidden hand of G*d's guidance. As through our days we rush, we often see not G*d's guiding hand, yet gentle reflection reveals signs of G*d's brush, and looking back we see, not one but two [sets of] footprints in the sand.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, אוזר ישראל בגבורה:

Blessed is Hashem who girds Israel with strength.

This girding with strength is the great courage and heroism that Esther shows after three days of fasting and prayer, of risking her life for her people. This reveals to us that prayer and faith can serve as a pillar of strength to us especially in times of trouble, adversity or misfortune.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, עוטר ישראל בתפארה:

Blessed is Hashem who crowns Israel with beauty/splendor.

Through Esther's beauty she is crowned, but through the compassionate use of her crown, she shows the true inner beauty of her soul by saving her people. Our crowning splendor is our inner *neshamah* which connects us to each other and to G*d.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, הנותן ליעף כח:

Blessed is Hashem who gives strength to the weary.

Despite three days of fasting (and prayer) Esther finds the *koach*, the strength, and the courage to dress herself in her finest garments and win the favor of the king....So too can we learn that even when we are weary, or a task seems too great, prayer can rekindle our inner fire and provide us with new strength and courage.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, המעביר שנה מעיני ותנומה מעפעפי:

Blessed is Hashem who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

In *Megillat Esther*, as in the story of Joseph, G*d intervenes at night to awaken the king who would like to sleep, and through the king's probing, the truth that is hidden becomes revealed. In this way great harm is controlled, overturned, and becomes blessing. So too, our inner perception can, at times, sharpen and clarify, when we are in a sleeplike state, and paradoxically may within our dreams have the ability to open the eyes of our inner consciousness and awaken us from our false assumptions to the truths of reality.

Purim falls more frequently on a Tuesday than any other day of the week, therefore I have included this psalm for Tuesday.

Psalm 82⁶²

היום, יום שלישי בשבת

Today is the third day of the Shabbat (week).

This reminds us that the third day has special meaning in the *Megillat Esther*. It reminds us of the three days of fasting which Esther and her 7 maidens fasted in the palace while the Jews of the walled city of *Shushan* also fasted, so that when Esther went before the king she might find favor in his sight, rather than the harsh judgment of the king's unjust laws which resulted in the death of Esther's predecessor, *Vashti*.

עד מתי תשפטו עול, ופני רשעים תשאו סלה:

How long will you enforce violence/injustice in your judgment, and pardon the wicked?

This status of a government ruled by an unjust system of law, which Psalm 82 decries, is clearly relevant to the rule in Persia under *Achashverosh*. He has his first queen executed for a law he drafts while drunk, and approves a law for the genocidal slaughter of a race of his people, without even asking what race it is. It is a government without balance, with neither compassion nor wisdom, where only evil is done in judgment. The psalmist cautions us not

to allow this type of lawless injustice to operate in the world. Unfortunately, we simply have to open our eyes to see evil operating with the approval of governments throughout the world. Is genocide not active in our world? Do not most of the Islamic countries of the world spread anti-Semitic lies and hatred? Just as a ruler, the highest “judge” in the land, has no excuse not to pursue justice, isn’t it also true that we, the people of a democratic government, cannot abdicate our responsibilities to make sure that justice is pursued?

קומה אלהים שפטה הארץ, כי אתה תנחל בכל הגוים:

Arise G*d and judge the world, for Your dominion is over all nations.

Psalm 30 is the last prayer of the *Birchot HaShachar* service before the *Kaddish*.

From *Midrash Rabbah Esther*.⁶³

“Another comment on THEN TOOK *HAMAN* THE [KING’S] APPAREL AND THE HORSE, etc. He [*Haman*] came to Mordecai and said to him: ‘Rise and dress yourself. What an ill fate is mine! Yesterday I was busy erecting a gallows for him, and G*d is preparing for him a crown! I was preparing for you ropes and nails, and G*d prepares for you royal apparel. I was going to request from the king permission to hang you, and he has bidden me mount you on horseback. Rise and dress. He [*Haman*] then did to him all the things we have mentioned above.”

Let us read the words of Psalm 30 with the lenses of the characters of the *Megillat Esther*. First we imagine Mordecai looking forward toward G*d’s salvation from *Haman*’s decree of the slaughter of Jews.

“As he [Mordecai] was riding [high upon the king’s horse being led on foot by a dejected *Haman*] he began to praise G*d, saying:”⁶⁴

I will extol You, Oh L*rd, for You have raised me up, and have not permitted my enemies to rejoice over me. Oh L*rd my G*d, I cried to You, and You healed me; Oh L*rd, You brought up my soul from *Sheol*; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.⁶⁵

ארוממך ה" כי דליתני, ולא שמחת איבי לי:
ה" אלהי, שועתי אליך ותרפאני: ה" העלית מן שאול נפשי, חייתני
מירדי בור:

⁶² *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 27.

⁶³ *Midrash Rabbah Esther* 10:5 (on Psalm 30).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, Psalm 30, verses 2-5, 51.

“What did his [Mordecai’s] disciples say [on seeing this miraculous reversal of Mordecai’s fortune and looking forward to G*d’s salvation]?”⁶⁶

Sing praises unto the L*rd, Oh you His devout ones, and give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, but His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may tarry for the night, but with dawn will come joy (ibid. 5,6).⁶⁷

זמרו לה' חסידיו, והודו לזכר קדשו: כי רגע באפו, חיים ברצונו, בערב
לין בכי, ולבקר רנה:

“What did the [arrogant and] wicked *Haman* say [perhaps having the beginnings of fear]?”⁶⁸.

In my security I said: I shall never be moved. You have established, Oh L*rd, in Your favor my mountain as a stronghold—[Then] You hid Your face; [and] I was frightened.⁶⁹

ואני אמרתי בשלוי, בל אמוט לעולם: ה' ברצונך העמדתה להררי עז,
הסתרת פניך, הייתי נבהל:

“What did Esther say [before she approached the King with her petition]?”⁷⁰

To You, Oh L*rd, would I call, and to the L*rd I would appeal: What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth?⁷¹

אליך ה' אקרא, ואל ה' אתחנן: מה בצע בדמי, ברדתי אל שחת,
היודך עפר היגיד אמתך:

“What did the congregation of Israel say [after Esther and Mordecai sent out the second royal decree to allow the Jews to defend themselves]?”⁷²

Hear, Oh L*rd, and be gracious to me. Oh L*rd be my helper. You turned my mourning into dancing, You removed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.⁷³

שמע ה' וחנני, ה' היה עזר לי: הפכת מספדי למחול לי,
פתחת שקי ותאזוני שמחה:

“And what did the Holy Spirit [Heavenly Host] say?”⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Midrash Rabbah Esther.

⁶⁷ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, Psalm 30, verses 6-11.

⁶⁸ Midrash Rabbah Esther.

⁶⁹ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, Psalm 30, verses 12-13, 51, verses 1-2, 53.

⁷⁰ Midrash Rabbah Esther.

⁷¹ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, Psalm 30, verses 3-8, 53.

⁷² Midrash Rabbah Esther.

⁷³ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, Psalm 30, verses 9-11.

⁷⁴ Midrash Rabbah Esther.

So that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent; O L*rd my G*d, I will give thanks unto Thee for ever.⁷⁵

למען יזמרך כבוד ולא ידם, ה" אלהי לעולם אודך:

⁷⁵ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, Psalm 30, verses 12-13.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alkabetz, Shlomo, Manos HaLevi. translated by Carmel Kehati.
<<http://www.thirtysevenbooks.com/HolyDays/Purim.3.5762.htm>>.

Bender, Paul. "He Calls from the Small Aleph." Vayikra, Divrei Torah 5765. Academy for Jewish Religion Website. <<http://www.ajrsem.org/divreitorah/vayikra.htm>>.

Berman, Joshua A. "Hadassah Bat Abihail: The Evolution from Object to Subject in the Character of Esther." Journal of Biblical Literature 120.4 (2001): 647-669.

Bick, Ezra. "Purim: A Holiday in Disguise." Israel Koschitzsky Virtual Beit Midrash. <<http://www.vbm-torah.org/purim/pur60-eb.htm>>.

Birnbaum, Philip. Daily Prayer Book. New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1949.

Blumenthal David R. <<http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/ZoharicTexts.html>>.

Butting, Klara. "Esther: A New Interpretation of the Joseph Story in the Fight Against Anti-Semitism and Sexism." translated by Ursula Petruschke. Ruth and Esther. Ed. Athalya Brenner. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

Clines David J.A., Stephen E. Fowl and Stranley E. Porter; ed., "Reading Esther from Right to Left." JSOT Sup. 87 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990): 7.
<[http://www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcures/Postmodern 1/Estherfns.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcures/Postmodern%201/Estherfns.html)>.

Don, P., "Tallit." The Best of the Chassidic Song Festivals. Ed. Velvel Pasternak. Cedarhurst, N.Y: 1989. 26.

Fishman, Sylvia Barack. "Reading Esther: Cultural Impact on Responses to Biblical Heroines." Working Paper. Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University. (2002). <<http://www.brandeis.edu/hbi/pubs/wp9.pd>>.

Fleishman, Joseph. "Why Did Ahasuerus Consent To Annihilate The Jews." Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages 25.2 (1999): 41-58.

Greenstein, Edward. "A Jewish Reading of Esther." Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel. Eds. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine and Ernest S. Frerichs, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Harlow, Jules, Ed. Siddur Sim Shalom. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1985.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. Man's Quest For God. Santa Fe: Aurora Press, 1998.

Leibowitz, Nechama. Studies in Devarim. Jerusalem: The World Zionist Organization, 1980.

Lerner, Berel Dov. "No Happy Endings for Esther." Jewish Bible Quarterly 29.1 (2001).

Levenson, Jon Douglas. Esther: A Commentary. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1977.

Mykoff, Moshe. The Empty Chair: Finding Hope and Joy, Timeless Wisdom from a Hasidic Master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. Woodstock, Vt: Jewish Lights, 2001.

Polish, Daniel F. "Aspects of Ester: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Megillah of Esther and the Origins of Purim." JSOT 85 (1999): 86-89.

Scherman, Nosson and Meir Zlotowitz, Eds. Siddur Kol Ya'akov; The Complete ArtScroll Siddur. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1984.

White, Sidnie Ann. "Esther: A Feminine Model for the Jewish Diaspora." Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel. Ed. Peggy L. Day. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1989. 161-177.

Wolfson Elliot R. "Left Contained in Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics" in AJS Review 11 (1986): 27-52.

Zohar, Soncino translation. Brooklyn, N. Y.: Soncino Press, Judaic Classics Library, 1984.

Ziff, Joel. Mirrors in Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through the Jewish Year. Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996.

.