

Who's Who in the Megilla

Class #2: Mordechai and Esther

1) Esther, Chapter 2:

5. There was a Judean man in Shushan the capital, whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair the son of Shimei the son of Kish, a Benjamite,

הָאִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבֵּירָה וְשֵׁמוֹ מְרֹדְכַי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן-שִׁמְעִי בֶן-קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי:

6 who had been **exiled** from Jerusalem with the **exile** that was **exiled** with Jeconiah, king of Judah, which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had **exiled**.

וְאִשְׁרָה הַגִּלְגָּה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִם-הַגִּלְגָּה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָהּ עִם כְּנָצְיָה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָהּ נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל:

7 And he had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother, and the maiden was of comely form and of comely appearance, and when her father and mother died, Mordecai took her to himself for a daughter.

זוּיָהִי אִמּוֹן אֶת-הַדַּחֶשָׁה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת-דָּדוֹ כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וְאִם וְהַנְּעָרָה יָפֹת-תֵּאֵר וְטוֹבַת מְרֹאָה וּבְמוֹת אָבִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ לָקַחָהּ מְרֹדְכַי לִוְלָבָת:

8 And it came to pass, when the king's order and his decree were heard, and when many maidens were gathered to Shushan the capital, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.

תּוֹיָהִי בַהֲשָׁמַע דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ וּבְהַקְבִּיץ נְעָרוֹת רַבּוֹת אֶל-שׁוּשַׁן הַבֵּירָה אֶל-יַד הַגִּי וְתַלְקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל-בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-יַד הַגִּי שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים:

9 And the maiden pleased him, and she won his favor, and he hastened her ointments and her portions to give [them] to her, and the seven maidens fitting to give her from the king's house, and he changed her and her maidens to the best [portions in] the house of the women.

טוֹתִיטֵב הַנְּעָרָה בְּעֵינָיו וַתִּשְׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו וַיִּבְהַל אֶת-תְּמָרוֹקֶיהָ וְאֶת-מְנוּחֶיהָ לְתֵת לָהּ וְאֶת שְׂבַע הַנְּעָרוֹת הָרְאִיּוֹת לְתֵת-לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁנֶנָּה וְאֶת-נְעָרוֹתֶיהָ לְטוֹב בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים:

10 Esther did not reveal her nationality or her lineage, for Mordecai had ordered her not to reveal it.

לֹא-הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת-עַמָּהּ וְאֶת-מִוְלַדְתָּהּ כִּי מְרֹדְכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִגִּיד:

11 And every day, Mordecai would walk about in front of the court of the house of the women, to learn of Esther's welfare and what would be done to her.

יֵאָבֵדכְּלַיִם וַיּוֹם מְרֹדְכַי מִתְּהַלֵּךְ לְפָנָי חֲצַר בֵּית-הַנָּשִׁים לְדַעַת אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וּמַה-יַּעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ:

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12And when each maiden's turn arrived to go to King Ahasuerus, after having been treated according to the practice prescribed for the women, for twelve months, for so were the days of their ointments completed, six months with myrrh oil, and six months with perfumes, and with the ointments of the women.

יב ובהגיע תר נערה ונערה לבוא אל המלך אחשורוש מקץ היות לה כדת הנשים שנים עשר חדש כי כן ומלאו ימי מרוקיהן ששה חדשים בשמן המר וששה חדשים בפשמים ובתמרוקי הנשים :

13Then with this the maiden would come to the king; whatever she would request would be given to her to come with her from the house of the women to the king's house.

יג ובזה הנערה באה אל המלך את כל אשר תאמר ינתן לה לבוא עמה מבית הנשים עד בית המלך :

14In the evening she would go, and in the morning she would return to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, the guard of the concubines; she would no longer come to the king unless the king wanted her, and she was called by name.

יד בערב היא באה ובבקר היא שבה אל בית הנשים שני אליד שעשגז סריס המלך שמר הפילגשים לאתבוא עוד אל המלך כי אסחפץ בה המלך ונקראה בשם :

15Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail, Mordecai's uncle, who had taken her for a daughter, came to go in to the king, she requested nothing, except what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the guard of the women, would say, and Esther obtained grace in the eyes of all who beheld her.

טו ובהגיע תראסתר בתאביחיל יד מרדכי אשר לקחלו לבת לבוא אל המלך לא בקשה דבר כי אם את אשר יאמר הגי סריסה המלך שמר הנשים ותהי אסתר נשאת חו בעיני כלראיה :

16So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, to his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

טז ותלקח אסתר אל המלך אחשורוש אל בית מלכותו בחדש העשירי הוא חדש טבת בשנת שבע למלכותו :

17And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor before him more than all the maidens, and he placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

יז ויאהב המלך את אסתר מכל הנשים ותשא חן וחסד לפניו מכל הבתולות וישם כתר מלכות בראשה ומליכה תחת ושתי :

18And the king made a great banquet for all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast, and he granted a release to the provinces and gave gifts according to the bounty of the king.

יח ויעש המלך משתה גדול לכלשריו ועבדיו את משתה אסתר והנחה למדינות עשה ויתן משאת כיד המלך :

19And when the maidens were gathered a second time, and Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate

יט ובהקבץ בתולות שגית ומרדכי ישב בשער המלך :

20Esther would not tell her lineage or her nationality, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther kept Mordecai's orders as she had when she was raised by him.

כ אין אסתר מגדת מולדתה ואת עמה באשר צוה עליה מרדכי ואת מאמר מרדכי אסתר עשה באשר היתה באמנה אתו :

21In those days, when Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, of the guards of the threshold, became angry and sought to lay a hand on King Ahasuerus.

כא ביםים ההם ומרדכי יושב בשער המלך קצף בגתו ותירש שניסריסי המלך משמרי הסף ויבקשו לשלח יד במלך אחשוורוש :

22And the matter became known to Mordecai, and he told [it] to Queen Esther, and Esther told [it] to the king in Mordecai's name.

כב ויודע הדבר למרדכי ויגד לאסתר המלכה ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי :

23And the matter was investigated and found [to be so], and they were both hanged on a gallows, and it was written in the diary [that was read] before the king.

כג ויבקש הדבר וימצא ויתלו שניהם על עץ ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני

2)Megilla 12b:

There was a certain Jew in Shushan the castle, whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair the son of Shimei the son of Kish, a **Benjamite**" (Esther 2:5). The Gemara asks: **What is it conveying in the verse by saying the names of Mordecai's ancestors? If the verse in fact comes to trace his ancestry, it should continue tracing his lineage back all the way to Benjamin**, the founder of his tribe. **Rather, what is different** about these names that they deserve special mention?

The Gemara answers: A Sage **taught** the following *baraita*: **All of them are names by which Mordecai was called**. He was called **"the son of Jair"** because he was **the son who enlightened [heir] the eyes of all of the Jewish people with his prayers**; **"the son of Shimei"** because he was **the son whom God heard [shama] his prayers**; **"the son of Kish"** because he **knocked [hikish] on the gates of mercy and they were opened to him**.

3)The Kol Menachem Megilla:

According to the Talmud, Mordechai's lineage is traced by the megillah to highlight his prowess in prayer....This is surprising, when, classically, Mordechai is known for his vast Torah wisdom more than for prolonged or ecstatic prayer. He was famous both as a

member of the Sanhedrin, the highest Rabbinical court, and a member of the Great Assembly.... His sense of "inadequacy fostered during times of prayer only served to enhance his decisiveness and competence as a legal decisor, as humility broadened his intellectual horizons and brought him closer to Hashem, the author of the Torah (Based on Ma'amer, Shushan Purim 5734).

4)Megilla 12b:

The Gemara points out a contradiction: Mordecai is referred to as a "Jew [*Yehudi*]," apparently indicating that he came from the tribe of Judah, but in the continuation of the verse he is called "Benjamite" [*Yemini*], which indicates that he came from the tribe of Benjamin. Rav Nahman said: Mordecai was crowned with honorary names. *Yehudi* is one such honorary epithet, due to its allusion to the royal tribe of Judah, but it is not referring to Mordecai's tribal affiliation. Rabba bar bar Hana said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said an alternative explanation: Mordecai's father was from the tribe of Benjamin, and his mother was from the tribe of Judah....

5)Megilla 13a:

Rabbi Yohanan said a different explanation of the verse: Actually, [Mordecai](#) came from the tribe of [Benjamin](#). Why, then, was he referred to as *Yehudi*? On account of the fact that he repudiated idol worship, for anyone who repudiates idolatry is called *Yehudi*. It is understood here in the sense of *yihudi*, one who declares the oneness of God, as it is written: "There are certain Jews [*Yehuda'in*] whom thou hast appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylonia, Shadrach, Meshach, and [Abed-Nego](#); these men, O king, have not regarded you: They serve not your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up" ([Daniel 3:12](#)). These three individuals were in fact [Hananiah](#), [Mishael](#), and [Azariah](#), who were not all from the tribe of [Judah](#) but are referred to as *Yehuda'in* because they repudiated idol worship.

6)Rashi, Esther 2:5

A Judean man: because he was exiled with the exile of Judah; all those who were exiled with the kings of Judah were called יהודים [Judeans, Jews] among the nations, even if they were from another tribe.

7)B'reishit 30:35

She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This time I will praise Hashem." Therefore she named him Yehuda. Then she stopped bearing.

8)S'fat Emet:

The term "Yehudi" (derived from Judah, the 4th son of Jacob) has become a synonym for Jew. Yehudah's mother gave him that name because, as she said "I will praise G-d." Yehudah is thus a declaration that Jews always praise G-d, hence the common name Yehudi regardless of tribal origin.

9)Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi:

Mordechai is the administrator of the "Judean" dedication distributing it to his people, bolstering their own capacity for self effacing submission to G-d. The success of his education is evidenced by the fact that the people are also referred to as "Judeans" throughout the Megilla. They, too, like Mordechai, assumed the identity of "Judean" (Copied from: The Book of Esther, Kehot Publication Society).

10)Meam Loez:

Mordechai a descendant of Benjamin deserved to be instrumental in saving the Jewish people because Benjamin was the only brother who did not participate in the selling of Joseph into bondage.

...Mordechai was a descendant of King Saul and thus was instrumental in correcting Saul's iniquity of allowing Agag to escape and beget a son who was the forefather of Haman.

11)The Kol Menachem Megilla:

Moredechai was sitting at the king's gate: Here was a Jew, exiled from Jerusalem to a foreign land, and yet in the course of just a few years, he found himself in a position of influence over a far-reaching empire spanning 127 provinces. The Megillah is teaching us that if Divine providence grants you some measure of influence over a community, town, city, state or country, you must sense it as a calling from Above, responding with boldness and certainty in every effort to promote the values of Judaism. There is no room for doubt or speculation. G-d is speaking to you personally through providence (Based on Sicha of Purim 5744).

12) Esther, Chapter 4:

And Mordecai knew all that had transpired, and Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and he went out into the midst of the city and cried [with] a loud and bitter cry.

אומרדכי ידע את כל אשר נעשה ויקרע
מרדכי את בגדיו וילבש שק ואפר ויצא
בתוך העיר ויצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה :

13) Rashi, Esther 4:1

And Mordecai knew all that had transpired: The Master of Dreams told him that the celestial beings had concurred about it, because they had prostrated themselves to an image in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and because they had enjoyed Ahasuerus's feast.

14) Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik:

In short, the Jewish heart was commissioned by God to feel the pain of the millions, to share the travail of the world. Verily, the Jew is often "caught in the thicket;" he gets involved, willingly or unwillingly, in all sorts of crises and perplexing situations that seem to have nothing to do with him. Why? God wants the Jew to share in the suffering of humanity. The Jewish heartbeat should, according to the will of God, belong not to one person but to the multitudes. The Jewish heartbeat should be the beat of the I, thou, he, we, ye, they, of people one knows and of people one has never met. The Jew belongs to the world and is a universal being.

In other words, the Jewish historical experience should be a universal experience, a cosmic experience. The Jew prays not just for himself but also for all of humanity. The liturgy of the

Is a loud prayer more acceptable to God than a silent prayer? Does God measure the sound waves? The cry was loud and bitter because Mordecai was not a single person but a people; it was as loud as the cry of millions, and as bitter as the accumulated tears of millions. His cry was the sum total of all individual prayers. He incarnated the people. Through him and with him the nation cried. Haman, in his blind hatred, intuited this. The Mordecai who defies him is not just an individual, a lonely, single Jew, but Mordecai the people, Mordecai the nation, Mordecai the multitude. Therefore:

→ Haman sought to destroy all the Jews . . . the people of Mordecai (3:6).

15) Megilla, Chapter 10:

3. For Mordecai the Jew was viceroy to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and was found favorable by a majority of his brethren; He sought goodness for his people and spoke up for the welfare of all their children.

גבי מרדכי היהודי משנה למלך
אחשורוש וגדול היהודים ורצוי לרב
אחיו דרש טוב לעמו ודבר שלום לכל
זרעו :

16) Maharal:

The verse references three types of people and Mordechai's relationship with each: *Among his brethren*, his elite peers of the Sanhedrin, he was mostly found favorable... *he sought goodness for all his people*, the common folk; and he spoke up for the welfare of his children, those who are most vulnerable and cannot speak for themselves.

Esther:

1)Talmud, Megila 13a:

The verse states: **“And he had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther”** ([Esther 2:7](#)). She is referred to as **“Hadassah”** and she is referred to as **“Esther.”** What was her real name? It is taught in a *baraita* that the Sages differed in their opinion as to which was in fact her name and which one was a description: **Rabbi Meir says: Esther was her real name. Why then was she called Hadassah? On account of the righteous, who are called myrtles [hadassim], and so it states: “And he stood among the myrtles [hahadassim]”** ([Zechariah 1:8](#)).

Rabbi Yehuda differs and says: **Hadassah was her real name. Why then was she called Esther? Because she concealed [masteret] the truth about herself, as it is stated: “Esther had not yet made known her kindred nor her people”** ([Esther 2:20](#)).

Rabbi Nehemya concurs and says: **Hadassah was her real name. Why then was she called Esther? This was her non-Hebrew name, for owing to her beauty the nations of the world called her after Istahar, Venus. Ben Azzai says: Esther was neither tall nor short, but of average size like a myrtle tree, and therefore she was called Hadassah, the Hebrew name resembling that myrtle tree. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korḥa said: Esther was called Hadassah because she was greenish, having a pale complexion like a myrtle, but a cord of Divine grace was strung around her, endowing her with a beautiful appearance.**

The verse initially states with regard to Esther: **“For she had neither father nor mother”** ([Esther 2:7](#)). **Why do I need to be told in the continuation of the verse: “And when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter”?** Rav Aḥa said: This repetition indicates that **when her mother became pregnant with her, her father died, and when she gave birth to her, her mother died,** so that she did not have a mother or a father for even a single day.

The verse states: **“And when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter”** ([Esther 2:7](#)). A *tanna* taught a *baraita* in the name of Rabbi Meir: **Do not read the verse literally as for a daughter [bat], but rather read it as for a home [bayit].** This indicates that Mordecai took Esther to be his wife.

2)Talmud, Megillah 13b.

In the merit of her modesty, Rachel became the ancestor of Shaul; in the merit of his modesty, Shaul became the ancestor of Esther.

3)C.S. Lewis

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it means thinking of yourself less.

4)Talmud, Megillah 15a

Whoever reports a saying in the name of he who said it brings redemption to the world. As it is stated with respect to the incident of Bigthan and Teresh: “And Esther reported it to the king in the name of Mordecai” (Esther 2:22), and this eventually brought redemption, as Mordecai was later rewarded for saving the king’s life, paving the way for the miraculous salvation.

5)Esther, 4:14

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and rescue will arise for the Jews from elsewhere, and you and your father's household will perish; and who knows whether at a time like this you will attain the kingdom?"

יִדְבְּקֵי אִם־הִחֲרַשׁ תִּחְרִישׁ בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת הַנּוֹחַ
וְהַצִּלָּה יֵעָמֹד לַיהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אֲחֵר
וְאֵת וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ תִּאֲבָדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לָעֵת
כִּזְאת הִגַּעְתָּ לְמַלְכוּת:

6)Talmud, Yevamot 88a

הוא שתיקה כהודאה - Being silent shows you agree.

7)The Book of Esther, Kehot Publication Society:

Relief and Salvation will arise for the Jews from another source, he challenged. This isn't about you being the only hope for the Jews. G-d will find a way to save His people. This is about the purpose for your existence, the very reason for the direction your life has taken. The Talmud says that although every Jew is expected to fulfill every Mitzvah, each soul is given one Mitzvah to cherish and observe zealously. The Mitzvah given to you may seem unfamiliar. It may not neatly fit into your self conception. But, for reasons beyond our understanding, G-d gives it to you to hone and perfect.

Mordechai was telling Esther that regardless of whether it seemed logical or not, this was her soul's purpose. Who knows, says Mordechai, perhaps you have attained your royal position for just such a crisis. He uses the expression “who knows,” because the destiny wedded to each soul is a Divine mystery beyond our ken.

8) Esther, Chapter 4

15. Then Esther ordered to reply to Mordecai:

טו ותאמר אסתר להשיב אלמרדכי :

16"Go, assemble all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, day and night; also I and my maidens will fast in a like manner; then I will go to the king contrary to the law, and if I perish, I perish."

טז לך כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן וצומו עלי ואלתאכלו ואלתשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום גם אני ונערתי אצום כן ובכך אבוא אלהמלך אשר לא כדת וכאשר אבדתי אבדתי :

17 So Mordecai passed and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

יז ויעבר מרדכי ויעש ככל אשר צוהה עליו אסתר :

9) Megilla 15a:

And Esther further said: **"And if I perish, I perish"** (Esther 4:16). What she meant was: **Just as I was lost to my father's house** ever since I was brought here, **so too, shall I be lost to you**, for after voluntarily having relations with Ahasuerus, I shall be forever forbidden to you.

10) Esther, Chapter 5

1 Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther clothed herself regally, and she stood in the inner court of the king's house, opposite the king's house, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the royal palace, opposite the entrance of the house.

א ויהי ביום השלישי ותלבש אסתר מלכות ותעמד בחצר בית המלך הפנימית לנכח בית המלך והמלך יושב על כסא מלכותו בבית המלכות לנכח פתח הבית :

11) Rashi, Esther 5:1

regally: regal clothing. But our Sages said (Meg. 15a) that divine inspiration enwrapped her.

12) Esther, Chapter 9

32 Now Esther's order confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was inscribed in the book.

לב וימאמר אסתר קלם דברי הפרים האלה ונכתב בספר :

13) Megilla 7a:

Rav Shmuel bar Yehuda said: Esther sent to the Sages: Establish me for future generations. Esther requested that the observance of Purim and the reading of the Megilla be instituted as an ordinance for all generations. **They sent to her: You will thereby arouse the wrath of the nations upon us**, as the Megilla recounts the victory of the Jews over the gentiles, and it is best not to publicize that victory. **She sent back to them: I am already written in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia**, and so the Megilla will not publicize anything that is not already known worldwide.