



ESTHER'S SECRET

Purim 5783

Blessing for studying the Megillah

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל מִקְרָא מְגִלָּה.

Ba-ruch a-tah A-do-nai, E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech ha'o-lam, a-sher kid-sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav, v'tzi-va-nu al mi-kra m'gi-llah.

THE SECRET

Esther 2:20

אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מְגֵדֶת מוֹלֶדֶתָהּ וְאֵת עַמָּה כְּאֲשֶׁר
צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מֶרְדֳּכָי וְאֵת מֵאֲמֵר מֶרְדֳּכָי אֶסְתֵּר
עָשָׂה כְּאֲשֶׁר הִצִּיתָ בְּאִמְנָה אֶתּוֹ:

Esther did not reveal her origins or her kindred, as Mordechai had commanded her; for what Mordechai commanded, Esther did, just as she had when he was bringing her up.



FEAR OF ANTISEMITISM

Targum Sheiniⁱ

לֹמָה לֹא חוּיֵאת אֶסְתֵּר תַּלְדוּתָהּ דִּילְמָא רְגִיז
עָלָה מַלְכָּא וְקִטְלָהּ וּמְשִׁיזִי לַעֲמָא.

Why did Esther not reveal her origins? Lest the king become angry and kill her – and also decide to exterminate her people.

Rabbi Sa'adiyah Ga'onⁱⁱ

Had they known that she was a Jew, it is quite likely that they would have harassed her and even strongly pressured her to forsake her religion, perhaps also keeping close watch over her and taking special care to ensure that she would be unable to keep any of its obligations.

ⁱ Esther 2:10

ⁱⁱ Esther 2:11. Translation from Judaeo-Arabic by Michael G Wessler, *The Book of Conviviality in Exile* (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 192.

*Rishon l'Tziyyon*ⁱⁱⁱ

ידוע הוא שבאותו זמן היו ישראל שבויים
וקלי הערך וחש מרדכי לכבוד אסתר שלא
תתבזה בעיני אחשורוש מצד גריעותה
להיותה מבני השביה.

It was known at the time that the Israelites were a captive people, and of little worth. So Mordechai feared for Esther's honour, and did not want her to be debased in the king's eyes for being a wretched member of such a lowly, captive people.

Tosafot ha-Shalem^{iv}

אמר לה, יודע אני שמרוב יופיך
לא יניח מלשכב עמך, ואם
תחרישי ולא תגידי את מולדתך,
שמה ימליך אותך, ואם תגלי לו
שאת יהודית לא יניחוהו שריו
להמליך יהודית.

Mordechai said to her: "The king will obviously sleep with you on account of your beauty. The best you can do is mute yourself and not reveal your origins, because then maybe he will marry you.^v Whereas if you reveal to him that you are a Jew, his ministers will never allow a Jew to reign!"



ⁱⁱⁱ Esther 2:10

^{iv} Esther 2:10:2

^v Literally, 'crown you'.

A different Tosafot ha-Shalem^{vi}

וא"ת למה היה יושב בשער המלך ... היה יושב ומצפה מתי יבא לו שעה שיחטוף את אסתר ויוליכה למקום אחר ואחשורוש לא משים לבו כלל שהיא יהודית. אבל אם היתה מגדת מולדתה ואת עמה אז לא היה תקנה, כי אם מרדכי גונבה, אז היה אחשורוש תופס כל היהודים עד שיחזירנה.

You may be wondering why Mordechai always sat at the gate of the palace.^{vii} He sat and waited for an opportunity to abduct Esther and spirit her away to safe place. King Ahasuerus did not know that she was Jewish – but if she had revealed her origins and her kindred, then there would have been no option for her to escape, for if Mordechai had taken her, Ahasuerus would have held all of the Jews hostage until she was returned.

Chut Shel Chessed^{viii}

הדבר מפליא מאוד, הלא מצא אותה בבית מרדכי היהודי, ואיזה ספק היה בדבר? ... חשבו שמרדכי היהודי חטף נכרית, ורצה לאמץ אותה כבת, ושמחו, כי נלקחה מביתו ולא תשאר יהודית.

That Esther did not reveal her background is exceedingly strange. Was she not found in the house of Mordechai the Jew? So how could there be any doubt that she was also a Jew? Everybody assumed that Mordechai the Jew had kidnapped a gentile girl, wanting to adopt her as a daughter. So everyone rejoiced, because she was taken from his house and would no longer be a Jew.



^{vi} Esther 2:19:7

^{vii} Esther 2:19

^{viii} Esther 2:10

FEAR OF PHILOSEMITISM

Rashi^{ix}



כדי שיאמרו שהיא ממשפחה בזויה
וישלחוה שאלם ידעו שהיא ממשפחת
שאל המלך היו מחזיקים בה.

In order that they would say she was from a bad family, and let her go. For if they knew she was from the same family as King Saul, they would definitely hang onto her.

Rabbi Eliezer of Worms^x

אם תאמר שהיא יהודית המלך באהבתו
אותה יצוה שכל השרים ישאו יהודיות.

If she revealed that she was Jewish, the king – in his love for her – would have commanded all his ministers to marry Jewish women.



UTILITY

Nachal Eshkol^{xi}

כשאננם יודעים שהיא יהודים אם
יועצים עצה רעה אינם מעלימים ממנה.

So long as they did not know she was Jewish, if they hatched evil plans relating to the Jews, they would not hide them from her.

^{ix} Esther 2:10

^x Recounted in Nachal Eshkol to Esther 2:10

^{xi} Esther 2:10

Maharsha^{xii}

אין אסתר מגדת את עמה – עשתה כן כדי
שלא יתקנאו בה ... ותהי אסתר נושאת חן
בעיני כל רואיה ... דכל אחד ואחד נדמטה
לו כאומתו.

Esther did not reveal her kindred: she did this in order to avoid
riling people up, for *Esther won the admiration of all who saw her*
(*Esther 2:15*), and everybody imagined her to be a member of
their own people.

Zefira Gitay^{xiii}

Esther manages to establish herself as authoritative queen not only by her beauty, but also by her personality and wisdom. Esther knows how to communicate with people: she finds favour in the eyes of her attendants.^{xiv} Her discretion with regard to revealing her ancestry and identity suggests that she knows what can and should be done, and what is forbidden, in the diplomatic arena. As an orphan, her family ties are not visible, thus she can act freely in court. At the same time, she is portrayed as the daughter of a monarchic family, which means that she has the genealogical background for becoming a queen.



^{xii} Chiddushei Aggadot to b.Megillah 13a, sv 'Esther'

^{xiii} Zefira Gitay, "Esther and the queen's throne" in Athalya Brenner (ed), *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 136-148: 141.

^{xiv} Esther 2:7

Notes...