

Pardes Rodef Shalom Schools Program

The Story of Purim Through a Constructive Mahloket (Disagreement) Lens



Teacher's Guide

Revised: January 2018



The [Pardes Rodef Shalom Schools Program](#) is a joint venture of the **Pardes Center for Jewish Educators** and the **Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution (PCJCR)**. The **9Adar Project** is also a program of PCJCR..

© 2018 Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. All Rights Reserved.

מטרת התוכנית היא להעניק למשתתפים כלים ושיטות לניהול מחלוקות בשיטות בונה ומשפרות את הקהילה.

The Story of Purim Through a Constructive Mahloket (Disagreement) Lens

Opening note to teacher:

- This Purim lesson encourages students to use a "biblical mahloket lens" when reading selected biblical passages. This entails approaching the text with openness to exploring the perspective of *all* the characters involved. We want students to improve their skills in identifying multiple perspectives in a text. This, in turn, will help further develop their empathy and critical reading.
- The texts in this lesson explore Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman (Esther chapter 3). It is important to make clear to students that from the perspective of *halacha* (Jewish law) there is no prohibition against bowing to a human to show them respect (there are several instances of Biblical characters bowing to each other, for example in Genesis 33:7 Yaakov bows to Esav). It is only forbidden to bow to idols. Without clarity on this point, the question 'why does Mordechai refuse to bow?' is not salient.
- Source C in the *Havruta* Handout is found in a manuscript version of the Babylonian Talmud, but is not included in the printed Vilna version of the Talmud that most people study. This seemingly strange *midrash* is riffing on the dynamic of Yaakov and Esav – Esav sold his birthright for soup and bread. In our text, Haman plays the role of Esav, who trades his honor and status 'for bread.' A longer version of this story can also be found in *Legends of the Jews*, Ginzberg, Vol. 4 pgs 397-399, which can be accessed online [here](#) as well as in the 'additional sources' section of the Source Sheet included with this lesson.

Lesson Goals:

Students will...

- Improve their skills at seeing the multiple sides to any particular story.
- Have the opportunity to explore the multiple possible motivations of characters in the Purim story (Haman and Mordechai) and appreciate that perhaps the characters are not as black and white as we tend to assume.
- Realize that ambiguities in the text provide us with opportunities for exploring multiple perspectives on conflicts between biblical characters.

Today's Questions (recommended for the board):

- Is it possible that Haman was not as bad as we thought?
- Is it possible that one of our heroes from Megilat Esther, Mordechai, didn't always act honorably?

Optional Starter Activity:

Have a class discussion or ask students to journal in response to the following prompts:

- Have you ever assumed that someone did something wrong or not nice, only to learn after the fact that you had made an incorrect assumption about what they did or why they did it?
- Have you ever gotten frustrated because someone got unnecessarily mad at you for something because they did not try to understand your perspective?

OR

Discuss the old/young lady image (see the *Havruta* Handout) and the lessons students think that the artist was trying to teach.

Students engage in text study:

At this point, students can engage with the provided texts (see the *Havruta* Handout, the Source Sheet and/or the [Ginzberg selection](#)) in whatever way or combination of ways that is most appropriate based on the timing of the lesson, level of the students and nature of the content. Students can study independently, in pairs, small groups, or as a class. The teacher might consider giving the students a choice of their preferred method and can break up the text study by inserting questions or activities of his/her own design throughout.

Big ideas that should emerge from students' text study:

While the texts included in this lesson are rich and can be interpreted and utilized in a variety of ways, here are some of the big ideas/answers that we hope would emerge from students' study and discussion (in addition, of course, to other ideas that you and your students might generate):

- Our tradition sees Biblical texts as ambiguous by design. This means that character motivation, emotion and thoughts are often left to the reader's discernment. This invites readers to see the texts and characters from multiple perspectives. There is a long Jewish tradition of biblical commentaries discussing the different possible motivations and thoughts of biblical characters.
- Within the Jewish tradition, there is more than one way of understanding the dynamic between Mordechai and Haman. While it is easier to imagine Haman as pure evil and Mordechai as the one who stands up for goodness, we are asked to consider a different dynamic between the characters – one in which it was Mordechai's pride and stubbornness that triggered Haman's anger and resentment.
- Seeing the two sides of the Mordechai/Haman dynamic in this one short scene encourages students to think about other scenes from the *megilah*, other texts and life which might be read with a Biblical mediation lens.

Suggested Activities and/or Assessments for the close of the lesson:

- Have students write a blog-post, tweet, Facebook post, op-ed piece either from the perspective of Haman, Mordechai or one of their friends in the aftermath of the 'refusal to bow' scene.
- Students write their own *midrash* explaining the motivations of the characters in this scene.
- Have students choose a story from the news/current events (or the teacher can provide a story) for students to read with a 'mahloket lens' to draw out the perspective or motivation of the different parties involved. Why would someone act that way? How are both sides feeling?
- Have students choose either interpretation of the story presented in the texts (or create their own) and write a dialogue between Haman and Mordechai. Could the attempted slaughter of the Jews been prevented if Mordechai and Haman tried harder to understand each other's perspective?
- Students can choose another scene in the Megilah with at least two characters, identify a question or ambiguity about the characters' motivations or feelings and then portray the two sides of the same story.



The Story of Purim Through a Constructive Mahloket (Disagreement) Lens

A. Esther 3:1-6

Some time afterward, King Achashverosh promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low. Then the king's courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's order?" When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone; having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

אסתר ג:א-ו

אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך
אחשוורוש את-המן בן-המדתא האגגי
וינשאהו וישם את-כסאו מעל
כל-השרים אשר אתו: וכל-עבדי
המלך אשר-בשער המלך כרעים
ומשתחיים להמן כי-כן צוה-לו המלך
ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה: ויאמרו
עבדי המלך אשר-בשער המלך
למרדכי מדוע אתה עובר את מצות
המלך: ויהי באמרם [כאמרם] אליו
יום יום ולא שמע אליהם ויגידו להמן
לראות היעמדו דברי מרדכי כי-הגיד
להם אשר-הוא יהודי: וירא המן
כי-אין מרדכי כרע ומשתחוה לו
וימלא המן חמה: ויבז בעיניו לשלח
יד במרדכי לבדו כי-הגידו לו את-עם
מרדכי ויבקש המן להשמיד
את-כל-היהודים אשר בכל-מלכות
אחשוורוש עם מרדכי:

B. Esther Rabbah 7:5

"Some time afterward, King Achashverosh promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low." (Esther 3:1-2) What had Haman done? He attached an embroidered [idolatrous] image to his garment upon his breast, and everyone who bowed down to Haman bowed down to the idolatrous image.

אסתר רבה פרשה ז:ה

"אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשוורוש את המן בן המדתא האגגי וינשאהו וצוה המלך שיהו כורעים ומשתחיים לו", מה עשה המן? עשה לו צלם מרוקם על בגדיו ועל לבו, וכל מי שיהיה משתחוה להמן היה משתחוה לעבודת כוכבים.



**C. Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 15a-15b - Mss. British
Museum 400**

Once King Achashverosh issued money to his heads of armies and dispatched them to conquer the province. Haman took his portion of the money [he received from the king] and spent it, and there did not remain anything, so when he came to spend it on the soldiers he did not have anything left. He approached Mordecai because (Mordecai was a possessor of money, and) the money was in Mordechai's hand just as the king had issued it to him. Haman said to Mordecai: "Lend me from this money which is in your hand." Mordechai said to him: "I will not lend to you unless you sell yourself to me as a slave." Haman accepted this upon himself and Mordechai made him the loan, and he wrote a contract as follows: 'Haman, the slave of Mordecai, has sold himself to Mordecai for a loaf of bread.' And this is what Mordecai says to Haman [when Haman expects Mordechai to bow to him]: When a slave acquires property - to whom does the slave belong? Therefore, to whom does the property belong? [Therefore, Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, because Mordechai thought it inappropriate to bow to his own slave.]

**בבלי מסכת מגילה טו
ע"א - טו ע"ב (כ"י ספרייה
בריטית (400) HARL. 5508
אשכנזי)**

פעם אחת נתן להם המלך
ממון ושיגרו ראשי גייסות
לכבוש את המדינה. נטל
המן חציו של ממון ואכלו ולא
נשתייר הימנו כלום וכשבא
להוציא על בעלי המלחמה
לא היה בידו כלום. בא אצל
מרדכי שכל הממון שלם בידו
כשם שנתנו לו המלך. אמ' לו
המן למרדכי הלויני מן ממון
זה שיש בידך. אמ' לו איני
מלוך אלא אם כן תמכור לי
נפשך לעבד קיבל על נפשו
והלווהו כתב ליה הכי
בשטרא המן עבדא דמרדכי
זבין נפשיה למרדכי בטולמא
דנהמא והינו דקאמ' ליה
מרדכי להמן עבדא דקני
ניכסי עבדא דמן ניכסי דמן.



Additional Sources (not found in the *Havruta* Handout)

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 61b	בבלי סנהדרין סא ע"ב
<p>Abaye said... It has been taught: <i>Thou shalt not bow down to them</i>. You may not bow down to them, but you may bow down to a human being like yourself. I might think that this applies even to one who is worshipped, like Haman; but the Torah adds "nor serve them."</p>	<p>ואמר אביי מנא אמינא לה? דתניא "לא תשתחוה להם" "להם": אי אתה משתחוה, אבל אתה משתחוה לאדם. יכול אפלו נעבד כהמן? ת"ל "ולא תעבדם".</p>

Aramaic Targum 1 Ester 3:1-6 ¹
<p>2. Now all the king's servants that were at the king's gate bowed down to the image which he set up on his chest and prostrated themselves to Haman, for that is what the king had commanded concerning him; Mordechai, however, would not bow down to the image, nor prostrate himself to Haman, because he was his working slave who was sold to him for a loaf of bread. 3. So the king's servants who were at the gate of the king's palace said to Mordechai: Why is it that you disobey the king's command? 4. As they spoke to him day after day and he did not listen to them, they informed Haman in order to see how Mordechai's deeds would hold up, for he would not bow down to Haman because he was his slave who sold himself to him for a loaf of bread, and to the image which he sat upon his chest he would not bow down, because he was a Jew, and Jews did not pay homage or bow down to him. 5. When Haman saw that Mordechai would not bow down to the image nor pay homage to him, Haman became filled with anger against Mordechai. 6. However, it was derisive to him to stretch out a hand to kill just Mordechai alone, for they had told him that Mordechai was a descendent of Jacob, who took away the birthright and the blessing from Esau, his paternal grandfather, and the Jews (were) the people of Mordechai; and so Haman sought to wipe out all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes, the people of Mordechai.</p>

Jerusalem Targum Ester 3 [Mss. Paris Heb. 110.] ²
<p>In the second year of Xerxes' reign a province by the name of Hindaqi rebelled against him. Whereupon the king assembled many troops to subdue it. He then sent them hastily upon it while appointing Mordechai over half of them equally and Haman over half of them, and he provided them equally with food and provisions, enough for three years. So they set out to besiege the province of Hindaqi, Mordechai and his troops from the east and Haman and his troops from the west. Haman, however, proceeded to spend all his funds and (use up) all his provisions which the king had given him for the sustenance</p>

¹ Grossfeld, Bernard. **The Two Targums of Esther**. The Aramaic Bible Vo. 18. The Liturgical Press. 1990. p. 141-142.

² Grossfeld p. 141-142, see n. 1. See also Ginzberg L. *Legends of the Jews* who refers to Manot Havevi of R. S. Alkabez, 1590.



of (his) half of the troops, in one year. Mordechai, however, conserved his funds and sustained (his) half of the troops according to the standards of those who go out to war but remain behind in the camp. As he realized that nothing was left for him of the funds and provisions which the king had given him to sustain (his) half of the troops, (Haman said): 'Woe is to me now, (for if) I will be detained in battle we will have nothing to eat.' So he went to Mordechai (and) said to him: 'Here, all of the food which the king gave to me to sustain the troops over which I was appointed at the beginning, it is all spent and gone, as of now, we have nothing to eat and are about to die of starvation.' Whereupon, Mordechai said to him: 'Of everything that he gave us, did not he give us equally half, even now I still have in my possession two parts of everything that the king gave to me, but as for you why have you squandered your part?' Said Haman to him: 'If it pleases you, lend me and I will repay you two for one.' Said Mordechai to him: 'For two I will not lend you one; if I would give you the provisions of my troops, from what will they be sustained? Furthermore, I will not lend to you with interest because I am (a descendant) of Jacob and you of Esau, and Esau and Jacob were brothers, and the Law says: You may lend to a gentile with interest but to your brother you may not lend with interest.' However, it was not so, he was only trying to rid himself of Haman. As mealtime arrived, Haman's troops came to him and said: 'Give us something so we may eat.' However, he had nothing to give, so they sought to kill him. (So) he returned to Mordechai (and) said to him: 'Lend me and I will repay you ten for one.' He replied to him: 'I will not lend to you with interest at all, but if you want to sell yourself to me as a slave I will sustain my troops and your troops.' Said Haman: 'I swear.' So they looked for a piece of parchment upon which to write the deed of sale but could not find (one). So Mordechai proceeded to write the deed of sale on his legging cross the knee, and thus it was clearly written:

I Haman, son of Hammedatha, a descendent of Agag, King Xerxes dispatched me to wage war against the province of Hindaqi and appointed me over sixty thousand soldiers, and the king gave me provisions for their sustenance. Thus, he also did for Mordechai, son of Shimi, son of Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin. As for me, I squandered the property of the king and they left my possession, so that I have nothing left in my possession with which to sustain the troops of the king. So I went to borrow from Mordechai with interest, but he said that it is forbidden to lend with interest because Esau and Jacob were brothers. So I was unable to spend (anything) of mine until I sold myself to him as a slave. Now, if I refrain from being his slave, or perhaps I will not admit that I am his slave, or perhaps I refuse to work for him for one day a week all the days of my life and (the life) of my sons (and my son's sons) until the end of all generations, or perhaps I will harbor ill feelings toward him on account of the sale in which I sold myself to him, just as Esau harbored ill feelings toward Jacob on account of the birthright, let a beam be pulled from the house of Haman and let him be lifted up and hanged on it. Now I, Haman, son of Hammedatha, a descendant of Agag, accept (it upon myself) to be



a field slave to Mordechai the Jew according to all that is written in this document according of my own free will and according to the desire of my soul.

At the end of three months, the province of Hindaqi was subdued under their control. So they plundered the province and killed all the men, while they bound all its worthy individuals in chains and brought them to King Xerxes. Henceforth, this province remained under King Xerxes' control all the years of his life and all the years of Darius, son of Queen Ester, on account of Mordechai. However, Haman, son of Hammedatha, became a field slave to Mordechai the Jew for one day a week, until that time that the king dignified Haman, son of Hammedatha, a descendent of Agag, and he promoted him, placing his position above those of all the princes and servants of the king. Now, as soon as he ceased serving Mordechai, Mordechai sent him (word): 'Why do you not serve me one day a week as it is written in the deed of sale?' Whereupon Haman sent him (reply): 'Set me free and I will give you ten thousand talents of silver.' So Mordechai sent back word to him: 'If you would give me all your money I would not set you free; for people say as follows- to whom a slave belongs, his property belongs.' Immediately thereupon, Haman's anger grew strong and he said to himself: 'I am going to give ten thousand talents of silver to the king, so that he will deliver Mordechai and his people to me; then I will hang Mordechai on the gallows and his people I will kill by sword. Thus, I will find myself free from Mordechai's enslavement, and pay back his people (for) what their ancestor Jacob did to my ancestor Esau.' Immediately, as Haman left the presence of the king, Mordechai stretched out his right foot and showed Haman the deed of sale. He, however, did not rise nor move himself for him. However, since it seemed to him beneath his dignity to lay hands on Mordechai alone, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews. Said the wise ones to him: 'Why is this that you are disobeying the order of the king?' He answered them: 'It is not right for a master to bow down to his slave.' Whereupon they said to him: 'Nevertheless, one should flatter the wicked.' So he replied to them, 'Is it not written in Isaiah's prophecy: "There is no peace, says my G-d, for the wicked."' As a result of this, Mordechai did not kneel nor bow down.

Legends of the Jews, Ginzberg, Vol. 4 pgs 397-399

"When Ahasuerus raised Haman to his high office, he at the same time issued the order, that all who saw him were to prostrate themselves before him and pay him Divine honors. To make it manifest that the homage due to him had an idolatrous character, Haman had the image of an idol fastened to his clothes, so that whoever bowed down before him, worshipped an idol at the same time. (100) Mordecai alone of all at court refused to obey the royal order. The highest officials, even the most exalted judges, showed Haman the reverence bidden by the king. The Jews themselves entreated Mordecai not to call forth the fury of Haman, and cause the ruin of Israel thereby. Mordecai, however, remained steadfast; no persuasions could move him to pay to a mortal the tribute due to Divinity. (101)



Also the servants of the king who sat at the gate of the royal palace said to Mordecai: "Wherein art thou better than we, that we should pay reverence to Haman and prostrate ourselves, and thou doest naught of all commanded us in the matter?" Mordecai answered, saying "O ye fools without understanding! Hear ye my words and make meet reply thereunto. Who is man that he should act proudly and arrogantly man born of woman and few in days? At his birth there is weeping and travailing, in his youth pain and groans, all his days are 'full of trouble,' and in the end he returns unto dust. Before such an one I should prostrate myself? I bend the knee before God alone, the only living One in heaven, He who is the fire consuming all other fires; who holds the earth in His arms; who stretches out the heavens in His might; who darkens the sun when it pleases Him, and illumines the darkness; who commanded the sand to set bounds unto the seas; who made the waters of the sea salt, and caused its waves to spread an aroma as of wine; who chained the sea as with manacles, and held it fast in the depths of the abyss that it might not overflow the land; it rages, yet it cannot pass its limits. With His word He created the firmament, which He stretched out like a cloud in the air; He cast it over the world like a dark vault, like a tent it is spread over the earth. In His strength He upholds all there is above and below. The sun, the moon, and the Pleiades run before Him, the stars and the planets are not idle for a single moment; they rest not, they speed before Him as His messengers, going to the right and to the left, to do the will of Him who created them. To Him praise is due, before Him we must prostrate ourselves."

The court officials spake and said: "Yet we know well that thy ancestor Jacob prostrated himself before Haman's ancestor Esau!"

Whereunto Mordecai made reply: "I am a descendant of Benjamin, who was not yet born when his father Jacob and his brothers cast themselves upon the earth before Esau. My ancestor never showed such honor to a mortal. Therefore was Benjamin's allotment of land in Palestine privileged to contain the Temple. The spot whereon Israel and all the peoples of the earth prostrated themselves before God belonged to him who had never prostrated himself before mortal man. Therefore I will not bend my knee before this sinner Haman, nor cast myself to earth before him." (102)

Haman at first tried to propitiate Mordechai by a show of modesty. As though he had not noticed the behavior of Mordechai, he approached him, and saluted him with the words: "Peace be with thee, my lord!" But Mordechai bluntly replied: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." (103)

The hatred of Mordechai cherished by Haman was due to more than the hereditary enmity between the descendants of Saul and Agag. (104) Not even Mordecai's public



refusal to pay the homage due to Haman suffices to explain its virulence. Mordecai was aware of a certain incident in the past of Haman. If he had divulged it, the betrayal would have been most painful to the latter. This accounts for the intensity of his feeling.

It once happened that a city in India rebelled against Ahasuerus. In great haste troops were dispatched thither under the command of Mordecai and Haman. It was estimated that the campaign would require three years, and all preparations were made accordingly. By the end of the first year Haman had squandered the provisions laid in to supply the part of the army commanded by him, for the whole term of the campaign. Greatly embarrassed, he requested Mordecai to give him aid. Mordecai, however, refused him succor; they both had been granted the same amount of provisions for an equal number of men. Haman then offered to borrow from Mordecai and pay him interest. This, too, Mordecai refused to do, and for two reasons. If Mordecai had supplied Haman's men with provisions, his own would have to suffer, and as for interest, the law prohibits it, saying "Unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury," and Jacob and Esau, the respective ancestors of Mordecai and Haman, had been brothers.

When starvation stared them in the face, the troops commanded by Haman threatened him with death unless he gave them their rations. Haman again resorted to Mordecai, and promised to pay him as much as ten per cent interest. The Jewish general continued to refuse the offer. But he professed himself willing to help him out of his embarrassment on one condition, that Haman sell himself to Mordecai as his slave. Driven into a corner, he acquiesced, and the contract was written upon Mordecai's knee-cap, because there was no paper to be found in the camp.

The bill of sale ran thus: "I, Haman, the son of Hammedatha of the family of Agag, was sent out by King Ahasuerus to make war upon an Indian city, with an army of sixty thousand soldiers, furnished with the necessary provisions. Precisely the same commission was given by the king to Mordecai, the son of Shimei of the tribe of Benjamin. But I squandered the provisions entrusted to me by the king, so that I had no rations to give to my troops. I desired to borrow from Mordecai on interest, but, having regard to the fact that Jacob and Esau were brothers, he refused to lend me upon usury, and I was forced to sell myself as slave to him. If, now, I should at any time decline to serve him as a slave, or deny that I am his slave, or if my children and children's children unto the end of all time should refuse to do him service, if only a single day of the week; or if I should act inimically toward him on account of this contract, as Esau did toward Jacob after selling him his birthright; in all these cases, a beam of wood is to be plucked out of the house of the recalcitrant, and he is to be hanged upon it. I, Haman, the son of Hammedatha of the family of Agag, being under no restraint, do hereby consent with my own will, and bind myself to be slave in perpetuity to Mordecai, in accordance with the contents of this

document."

Later, when Haman attained to high rank in the state, Mordecai, whenever he met him, was in the habit of stretching out his knee toward him, so that he might see the bill of sale. This so enraged him against Mordecai and against the Jews that he resolved to extirpate the Jewish people. (105)"

Additions to the Book of Esther, chapter 13 [Apocrypha]

Then Mordechai prayed to the Lord, calling to remembrance all the works of the Lord. He said: *9: "O Lord, Lord, King who rulest over all things, for the universe is in thy power and there is no one who can oppose thee if it is thy will to save Israel. 10: For thou hast made heaven and earth and every wonderful thing under heaven, 11: and thou art Lord of all, and there is no one who can resist thee, who art the Lord. 12: Thou knowest all things; thou knowest, O Lord, that it was not in insolence or pride or for any love of glory that I did this, and refused to bow down to this proud Haman. 13: For I would have been willing to kiss the soles of his feet, to save Israel! 14: But I did this, that I might not set the glory of man above the glory of God, and I will not bow down to any one but to thee, who art my Lord; and I will not do these things in pride.*

Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 11:6:5 [100 CE].

5. Now there was one Haman, the son of Hammedatha, by birth an Amalekite, that used to go in to the king; and the foreigners and Persians worshipped him, as Artaxerxes had commanded that such honor should be paid to him; but Mordechai was so wise, and so observant of his own country's laws, that he would not worship the man. When Haman observed this, he inquired whence he came; and when he understood that he was a Jew, he had indignation at him, and said within himself, that whereas the Persians, who were free men, worshipped him, this man, who was no better than a slave, does not vouchsafe to do so. And when he desired to punish Mordechai, he thought it too small a thing to request of the king that he alone might be punished; he rather determined to abolish the whole nation, for he was naturally an enemy to the Jews, because the nation of the Amalekites, of which he was; had been destroyed by them.



The Story of Purim Through a Constructive Mahloket (Disagreement) Lens

The texts (and image) and questions below are provided to help you think more about the possible connections between being a pursuer of peace and Purim.

YOUNG WOMAN OR OLD LADY?



- 1) What lesson do you think the artist was trying to teach us, by creating an image that can be seen in two different ways?
- 2) Can you think of other another example of something that can be seen, heard or understood in two (or more) totally different ways?

A. Esther 3:1-6

Some time afterward, King Achashverosh promoted Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordechai would not kneel or bow low. Then the king's courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordechai, "Why do you disobey the king's order?" When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordechai's resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordechai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordechai alone; having been told who Mordechai's people were,

אסתר ג:א-ו

אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך
אחשוורוש את-המן בן-המדנתא האגגי
וַיִּנְשְׂאֵהוּ וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת-כֶּסֶאוֹ מֵעַל
כָּל-הַשָּׂרִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: וְכָל-עַבְדֵי
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר-בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ כֹּרְעִים
וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהֵמָּן כִּי-כֵן צִוָּה-לּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
וּמֶרְדֵּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ
עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר-בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ
לְמֶרְדֵּכַי מִדּוּעַ אַתָּה עוֹבֵר אֶת מִצְוַת
הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיְהִי בֹאמְרָם [כְּאִמְרָם] אֵלָיו
יּוֹם וַיּוֹם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּגִּידוּ לְהֵמָּן
לְרֹאוֹת הַיַּעֲמָדוֹ דְּבַרֵי מֶרְדֵּכַי כִּי-הִגִּיד
לָהֶם אֲשֶׁר-הוּא יְהוּדִי: וַיֵּרָא הֵמָּן
כִּי-אֵין מֶרְדֵּכַי כֹּרַע וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לּוֹ
וַיִּמְלֵא הֵמָּן חֲמָה: וַיִּבַּז בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח
יָד בְּמֶרְדֵּכַי לְבַדּוֹ כִּי-הִגִּידוּ לּוֹ אֶת-עַם
מֶרְדֵּכַי וַיִּבְקֶשׂ הֵמָּן לְהַשְׁמִיד



Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordechai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

אֶת־כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְלָכוֹת
אֶחָשׁוּרוֹשׁ עִם מֶרְדֵּכָי:

- 3) Why does Haman expect people to bow to him?
- 4) Does the text indicate why Mordechai refuses to bow to Haman?
- 5) Why do you think Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman?
- 6) Was Mordechai's decision a sign of good leadership or not (think of what happens next in the story)?

B. Esther Rabbah 7:5

"Some time afterward, King Achashverosh promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordechai would not kneel or bow low." (Esther 3:1-2) What had Haman done? He attached an embroidered [idolatrous] image to his garment upon his breast, and everyone who bowed down to Haman bowed down to the idolatrous image.

אסתר רבה פרשה ז:ה

"אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשורוש את המן בן המדתא האגגי וינשאהו וצוה המלך שיהו כורעים ומשתחיים לו", מה עשה המן? עשה לו צלם מרוקם על בגדיו ועל לבו, וכל מי שהיה משתחוה להמן היה משתחוה לעבודת כוכבים.

- 7) What answer does this midrash provide to the question, 'Why did Mordechai refuse to bow to Haman'?
- 8) Is there textual evidence in the story in the megillah for this explanation? Do you find it convincing?
- 9) What do you think motivated the writer of this midrash to read the scene this way?

C. Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 15a-15b - Mss. British Museum 400

Once King Achashverosh issued money to his heads of armies and dispatched them to conquer the province. Haman took his portion of the money [he received from the king] and spent it, and there did not remain anything, so when he came to spend it on the soldiers he did not have anything left. He approached Mordechai because (Mordechai was a possessor of money, and) the money was in Mordechai's hand just as the king had issued it to him. Haman said to Mordechai: "Lend me from this

בבלי מסכת מגילה טו ע"א

- טו ע"ב (כ"י ספרייה בריטית HARL. 5508 (400) אשכנזי)

פעם אחת נתן להם המלך ממון ושיגרו ראשי גייסות לכבוש את המדינה. נטל המן חציו של ממון ואכלו ולא נשתייר הימנו כלום וכשבא להוציא על בעלי המלחמה לא היה בידו כלום. בא אצל מרדכי שכל הממון שלם



money which is in your hand.” Mordechai said to him: “I will not lend to you unless you sell yourself to me as a slave.” Haman accepted this upon himself and Mordechai made him the loan, and he wrote a contract as follows: ‘Haman, the slave of Mordechai, has sold himself to Mordechai for a loaf of bread.’ And this is what Mordechai says to Haman [when Haman expects Mordechai to bow to him]: When a slave acquires property - to whom does the slave belong? Therefore, to whom does the property belong? [Therefore, Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, because Mordechai thought it inappropriate to bow to his own slave.]

בידו כשם שנתנו לו המלך.
אמ' לו המן למרדכי הלויני
מן ממון זה שיש בידך. אמ'
לו איני מלווך אלא אם כן
תמכור לי נפשך לעבד קיבל
על נפשו והלווהו כתב ליה
הכי בשטרא המן עבדא
דמרדכי זבין נפשיה למרדכי
בטולמא דנהמא והינו דקאמ'
ליה מרדכי להמן עבדא דקני
ניכסי עבדא דמן ניכסי דמן.

- 10) What answer does this Talmudic story provide to the question, ‘Why did Mordechai refuse to bow to Haman’?
- 11) Is there textual evidence in the story in the megilah for this explanation? Do you find it convincing?
- 12) What do you think motivated the writer of this midrash to read the scene this way?

For further discussion:

- a. Why do you think there are two Rabbinic texts, each which portrays Mordechai and Haman very differently?
- b. Which version of the story do you like better? Why?
- c. Can you create your own *midrash* on the text answering the question, ‘Why did Mordechai refuse to bow to Haman’?