

FROM SHUSHAN TO TEL AVIV: ESTHER: AN ISRAELI COMMENTARY

R. Mishael Zion, Pardes, Adar 2019

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by Rabbi Mishael Zion;
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Esther sent to the Rabbis: Write me for generations.
(Talmid Bavli Megillah 7a)

Rav Asi taught: Why was Esther compared to the
dawn? To teach you: Just as the dawn is the end of
the entire night – so Esther is the end of all miracles.
(Talmud Bavli Yoma 29a)



PANEL WC 2. MORDECAI AND ESTHER, SCENE 1



PANEL WC 2. MORDECAI AND ESTHER, SCENE 2

Top: Hana Polani, 1929 Queen Esther of Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv Mayor Meir Dizengoff at the crowning ceremony of Polani. Bottom: Dora Europus panel, Syria 244.



שלחה להם אסתר לחכמים: כתבוני לדורות
מגילה ז, א

אמר רב אסי: למה נמשלה אסתר לשחר?
לומר לך: מה שחר סוף כל הלילה
-אף אסתר סוף כל הנסים.
תלמוד בבלי יומא כט, א



ESTHER AND VASHTI

Esther 5:1

On the third day, Esther put on royal apparel and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, facing the king's palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace.

Talmud Bavli 14a-b

The Sages taught in a baraita: Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied on behalf of the Jewish people, and they neither subtracted from nor added onto what is written in the Torah, introducing no changes or additions to the mitzvot except for the reading of the Megilla, which they added as an obligation for all future generations. [...]

Who were the seven prophetesses? Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.

Esther was also a prophetess, as it is written: "And it came to pass on the third day that Esther clothed herself in royalty" (Esther 5:1). It should have said: Esther clothed herself in royal garments. Rather, this alludes to the fact that she clothed herself with a divine spirit of inspiration. It is written here: "And she clothed herself," and it is written elsewhere: "And the spirit clothed Amasai" (I Chronicles 12:19)



John Everett Millais, Esther, 1865.

אסתר ה:א

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַתִּלְבַּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מְלָכוּת וַתַּעֲמֹד בַּחֲצַר בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּנִימִית נֹכַח בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא מְלָכוּתוֹ בְּבַיִת הַמְּלָכוּת נֹכַח פְּתַח הַבַּיִת:

תלמוד בבלי מגילה יד ע"א וע"ב

ת"ר ארבעים ושמונה נביאים ושבע נביאות נתנבאו להם לישראל ולא פחתו ולא הותירו על מה שכתוב בתורה חוץ ממקרא מגילה שבע נביאות מאן נינהו [=מי הם?] שרה, מרים, דבורה, חנה, אביגיל, חולדה ואסתר [...]

אסתר – דכתיב "וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַתִּלְבַּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מְלָכוּת".

'בגדי מלכות' מיבעי ליה?! אלא

שלבשתה רוח הקדש: כתיב הכא

"וַתִּלְבַּשׁ" וכתוב התם (דברי-הימים-

א יב יט): "וַיִּרוּחַ לְבָשָׁה אֶת עַמְשִׁי".

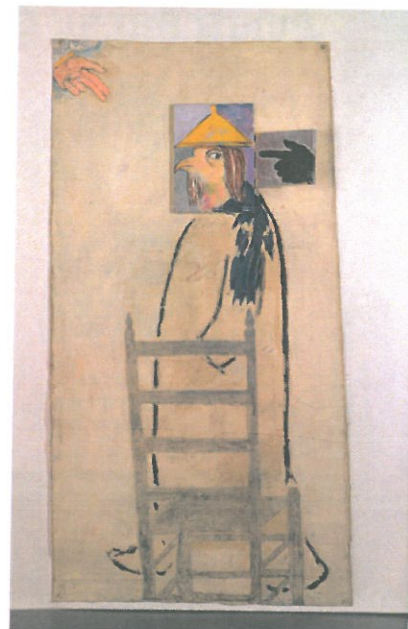
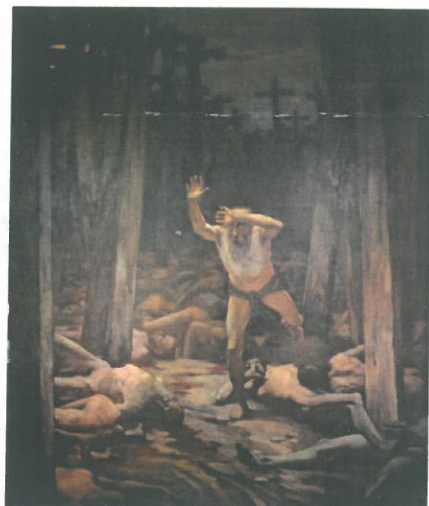
The Revolt of Vashti

Poems of Progress and New Thought

Pastels. by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919).

"I was a princess ere I was a queen,
And worthy of a better fate than this!
There lies the crown that made me queen
in name!
Here stands the woman--wife in name
alone!
Now, no more queen--nor wife--but
woman still--
Ay, and a woman strong enough to be
Her own avenger."

MORDECHAI: THE FIRST, WANDERING, JEW



Mordechai as curse and inspiration: from right to left: Gustav Dore inspired anti-Semitic cartoon, "The Eternal Jew" 1938; Shmuel Hirschenberg, "The Eternal Jew", Poland 1899; Michael Segen Cohen, "The Wandering Jew", 1983. Below: Ariele Allweil, 1942.

From Berlin to DC: Joachim Prinz speaks out against Silence

Joachim Prinz, the rabbi of the Berlin liberal community, recalled how, in the years after 1933, "people came by the thousands to the synagogue to listen to the story of Haman and Esther," which "became the story of our own lives." To those relatively assimilated German Jews, the Megilla, read in Hebrew and then translated, "suddenly made sense," for "it was quite clear that Haman meant Hitler." And not only did the long repressed spirit of vengeance reassert itself in the synagogue, but also the the noisemakers: "Never had I heard such applause in a synagogue when the names of the ten sons of Haman were read, describing their hanging from the gallows," recalled Rabbi Prinz. "Every time we read 'Haman' the people heard Hitler, and the noise was deafening. The little noisemakers became more than toys. They were the instruments of a demonstration in the midst of frustration."

Thirty years later, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, standing on the steps on the Lincoln Memorial and speaking right before Martin Luther King, Jr. would deliver his famous "I have a Dream" speech, Rabbi Prinz, now a leading American Reform Rabbi, gave a speech entitled: "I speak to you as an American Jew". In it he recalled his years as a Rabbi in Berlin under Nazi rule, and within his words one can hear the echo of Mordechai urging Esther: אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת – you must not be silent during these times:

"When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence. A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers. They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality and in the face of mass murder. America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent. Not merely black America, but all of America. It must speak up and act, from the President down to the humblest of us, and not for the sake of the Negro, not for the sake of the black community but for the sake of the image, the idea and the aspiration of America itself."



