

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Insights into the Bible [4]

The Inflection Point in the Book of Esther Insights into Chapter 4 of the Book of Esther



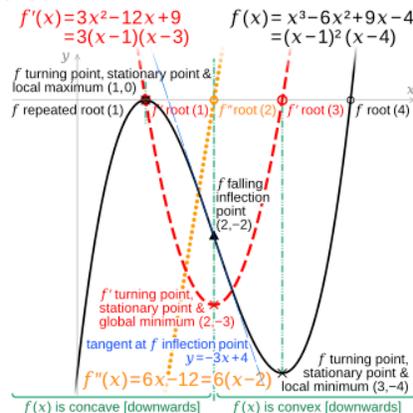
Esther and Mordechai, by Aert de Gelder (1645-1727)

Inflection Point

Mathematics

- a point of a curve at which a change in the direction of curvature occurs.

In differential calculus and differential geometry, an inflection point, point of inflection, flex, or inflection (rarely inflexion) is a point on a smooth plane curve at which the curvature changes sign. In particular, in the case of the graph of a function, it is a point where the function changes from being concave (concave downward) to convex (concave upward), or vice versa.



US English

- a time of significant change in a situation; a turning point.

What is an inflection point in life?

◆ AI Overview

An inflection point in life is a significant, pivotal moment that fundamentally alters your life's trajectory, acting as a crossroads where you shift from one path to another, often marked by major decisions, challenges, or new opportunities like a career change,

marriage, a health crisis, or relocation. These moments can be chosen (self-imposed) or forced upon you (imposed), creating a distinct "before and after," requiring adaptation and reflection to navigate the new direction, whether it leads to growth or profound change.



Can you think of an inflection point in your life?

The Book of Esther in a Nutshell

Adapted from "One Hour Purim Primer," by Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf.

CHAPTER 1 -- KING ACHASHVEROSH THROWS A PARTY

A lavish six-month celebration marks the third year in the reign of Achashverosh, king of Persia. Queen Vashti refuses the king's request to appear at the celebration and display her beauty for the assembled guests. The king's advisors counsel that Vashti be replaced with a new queen.

CHAPTER 2 -- ESTHER BECOMES THE QUEEN

Across the Persian Empire, officials are appointed to identify beautiful candidates to succeed Vashti as queen. A Jewish girl, Esther, the cousin of Mordechai, is brought to the capital of Persia as one of the candidates. Mordechai tells Esther to conceal her identity. Esther is chosen to be the queen. Mordechai learns of a plot to overthrow the king. Mordechai informs Esther, Esther tells the king, and the plotters are hanged.

CHAPTER 3 -- THE RISE OF HAMAN

Achashverosh appoints Haman to be his prime minister. All bow in homage to Haman. Mordechai consistently refuses to bow to Haman. An enraged Haman vows to kill all the Jews of Persia. Haman prevails upon Achashverosh to destroy the Jews. A royal edict is disseminated throughout Persia. The 13th of Adar is designated as the date to exterminate all the Jews and plunder their possessions.

CHAPTER 4 -- ESTHER'S MISSION BECOMES CLEAR

Mordechai tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of public mourning. Mordechai sends a copy of the decree to Esther and asks her to intercede with the king. Esther replies that to approach the king without being summoned is to risk death. Mordechai tells her that she has no choice. Esther tells Mordechai to ask the Jews to fast and pray for three days before she will approach the king.

CHAPTER 5 -- ESTHER'S STRATEGY, HAMAN'S FURY

King Achashverosh receives Esther and grants her virtually any request. Esther's request: that the king and Haman join her at a banquet. After the banquet, Haman sees Mordechai who once again refuses to bow. When Zeresh, Haman's wife, suggests that Mordechai be hanged, the gallows are prepared.

CHAPTER 6 -- THE REVERSAL BEGINS

The king can't sleep and asks to hear the royal chronicles. For the first time, the king learns of the assassination plot that Mordechai had revealed. That same night, Haman comes to see the king about hanging Mordechai. Before Haman can speak, the king tells Haman to honor Mordechai by dressing him in royal garments, to place him on a royal stallion and to personally lead him through the streets of Shushan, capital of Persia.

CHAPTER 7 -- REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

At the second banquet, Esther reveals her identity and announces that she and her people are about to be murdered. Esther identifies Haman as her arch enemy. The king has Haman hung on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordechai.

CHAPTER 8 -- THE REVERSAL IS COMPLETE

Mordechai is named prime minister to replace Haman. A second royal edict is promulgated empowering the Jews to fight and kill anyone who would try to harm them.

CHAPTER 9 -- THE HOLIDAY OF PURIM

On the 13th of Adar, a day that had been designated for Jewish destruction, the Jews are victorious over their enemies. The 10 sons of Haman are hung. The 14th and 15th of Adar are designated to celebrate the salvation. These are the days of Purim. Mordechai initiates the Purim practices -- consisting of a festive meal, the exchange of gifts of food, and the giving of monetary gifts to the poor.

CHAPTER 10 -- MORDECHAI AND PERSIA

Persia, with Mordechai as prime minister, flourishes. The role of Mordechai in the history of the Persian empire is recorded in the king's chronicles.

Esther, Chapter 4

¹ When Mordechai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. ² He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. ³ And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

? Why didn't Esther know about the king's decree?

? Why didn't Mordechai send a message to Esther as soon as he learned about the decree?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

⁴ So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed.

Bonus ? What did Esther's maids and eunuchs tell her?

Bonus ? How did Esther's maids and eunuchs know about the connection between Esther and Mordechai?

? How did Esther's maids and eunuchs know about Mordechai's situation (and she didn't)?

Then she sent garments to clothe Mordechai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them*.

? Why did Esther send clothes to Mordechai?

⁵ Then Esther called Hathach, *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordechai, to learn what and why this *was*.

Bonus ? Why did Esther send Hathach to Mordechai?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordechai in the city square that *was* in front of the king's gate. ⁷ And Mordechai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. ⁹ So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordechai.

¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordechai: ¹¹ "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, *he has* but one law: put *all* to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." ¹² So they told Mordechai Esther's words.

Extra Bonus ? Why didn't Esther accept Mordechai's mission?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Answer 5 _____

Answer 6 _____

Answer 7 _____

Answer 8 _____

¹³ And Mordechai told *them* to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordechai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

¹⁷ So Mordechai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.

Bonus ? How do we know that Mordechai was familiar with the king's edict about going into the inner court unannounced?

? What did Mordechai think of Esther's reply?

? After Mordechai's strong rebuke, Esther changed her mind and accepted the mission. What do you think made her change her mind?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Answer 5 _____

Answer 6 _____

Extra Bonus ? I would like to suggest that the inflection point in the Book of Esther occurs in Chapter 4. Can you point to the inflection point within Chapter 4? What makes it an inflection point?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____



Extra Bonus ? Our Book is called Esther, in honor of the main character of the story. What makes Esther the main heroine of our story, as opposed to Mordechai?



Extra Bonus "...Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" – Esther "tips" on finding our mission/purpose in life.

TOP TIPS

Tip # 1 – Everyone comes to this World with a purpose, a mission, a call.

Tip # 2 – The purpose/mission/call involves fixing something that needs to be fixed (making a *tikkun*).

Tip # 3 – The purpose/mission/call involves a journey from where we are to where we ought to be.

Tip # 4 – Knowing what our purpose/ mission/ call in life is, is the most important and the most difficult task we have in life.

Tip # 5 – Throughout our journey, we encounter different guides, mentors, whose mission (known or unknown to them and/or to us) is to help us realize our potential. For Esther, it was Mordechai, for Frodo Baggins, it was Gandalf, for Harry Potter, it was Dumbledore, for Luke Skywalker, it was Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda, for the Hassid, it is the Rebbe (many of Buber's stories circle around this motif).

Tip # 6 – We usually resist our mission/ purpose/ call and fight back.

Tip # 7 – Our mission/purpose/call is tailored-made for us. We, individually, are the only ones we can "fix" what is waiting for us to be fixed.

Tip # 8 – Your loved ones (spouse, children, friends) have their own mission/purpose/call, different than yours. You might be able to mentor them, but you *cannot do the job* for them.

Tip # 9 – Your mission/purpose/call can usually be fulfilled through a character trait, skill, gift, at which you are inherently good; what we call *your strength*.

Tip # 10 – There is no greater blessing than being in sync with your mission/purpose/call in life.