

From the Rabbi's Desk  
Rabbi Manes Kogan  
Hillcrest Jewish Center  
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366  
[rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org](mailto:rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org)

## Stories with a Twist [299]

### Perhaps There is Some Man Who Has Done a Favor for Me and I Have Not Rewarded Him

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Megilah 15b



## Background to Our Story

### The Purim Story



Purim, (Hebrew: "Lots") English Feast of Lots, a joyous Jewish festival commemorating the survival of the Jews who, in the 5th century BCE, were marked for death by their Persian rulers. The story is related in the biblical Book of Esther.

Haman, chief minister of King Ahasuerus, incensed that Mordecai, a Jew, held him in disdain and refused obeisance, convinced the king that the Jews living under Persian rule were rebellious and should be slaughtered. With the king's consent, Haman set a date for the execution (the 13th day of the month of Adar) by casting lots and built a gallows for Mordecai.

When word of the planned massacre reached Esther, beloved Jewish queen of Ahasuerus and adopted daughter of Mordecai, she risked her life by going uninvited to the king to suggest a banquet that Haman would attend. At the meal she pleaded for the Jews and accused "this wicked Haman" of plotting the annihilation of her people. Upset, the king stepped out into the palace gardens. On returning, he found Haman "falling on the couch where Esther was." The king mistook Haman's frantic pleas for mercy as an attack upon the queen. The outraged king ordered that Haman be hanged and that Mordecai be named to his position. Esther and Mordecai then obtained a royal edict allowing Jews throughout the

empire to attack their enemies on Adar 13. After an exhilarating victory, they declared the following day a holiday and (alluding to the lots Haman had cast) named it Purim.

### **Esther 5:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance.<sup>2</sup> When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

<sup>3</sup> Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

<sup>4</sup> "If it pleases the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him."

<sup>5</sup> "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks."

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. <sup>6</sup> As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

<sup>7</sup> Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: <sup>8</sup> if Your Majesty will do me the favor, if it please Your Majesty to grant my wish and accede to my request—let Your Majesty and Haman come to the feast which I will prepare for them; and tomorrow I will do Your Majesty's bidding."

### **Esther 6:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him.<sup>2</sup> It was found recorded there that Mordechai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus.

<sup>3</sup> "What honor and recognition has Mordechai received for this?" the king asked.

"Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

<sup>4</sup> The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling Mordechai on the pole he had set up for him.

<sup>5</sup> His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court."

"Bring him in," the king ordered.

<sup>6</sup> When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?"

Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" <sup>7</sup> So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, <sup>8</sup> have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. <sup>9</sup> Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'"

<sup>10</sup> "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordechai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

<sup>11</sup> So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordechai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

**Bonus** **?** Why did the king order that the book of the chronicles be brought in and read to him when he could not sleep?

**?** What does the king do when he learns that nothing was done to honor Mordechai?

### The Text: Babylonian Talmud Megilah 15b

"בְּלַיְלָהּ הַהוּא נִדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ."  
אָמַר רַבִּי תַנְחוּם: נִדְדָה שְׁנַת מַלְכוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם.  
וְרַבְּנָן אָמְרִי: נִדְדוּ עֲלִיּוֹנִים, נִדְדוּ תַחְתּוֹנִים.  
רַבָּא אָמַר: שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ מִמֶּשֶׁ.  
נִפְלָה לִיה מִיִּלְתָּא בְּדַעְתֵּיהּ, אָמַר: מַאי דְקָמֵן דְּזַמְיִנְתֵּיהּ אֶסְתֵּר לְהֶמֶן?  
דְּלָמָא עֲצָה קָא שְׁקֵלִי עֵילְוִיָּה דִּהְהוּא גַבְרָא לְמַקְטִילֵיהּ. הֵדֵר אָמַר: אִי הָכִי לָא הָוָה גַבְרָא דְרַחֲמִים לִי, דִּהְוָה מוֹדַע לִי? הֵדֵר אָמַר: דְּלָמָא אִינְיֵשׁ דְּעַבְד בֵּי טִיבוּתָא וְלָא פְרַעַתֵּיהּ, מְשׁוּם הָכִי מִימְנָעִי אִינְשֵׁי וְלָא מַגְלִו לִי. מִיָּד "וַיֹּאמֶר לְהַבִּיא אֶת סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹרוֹת דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים".

"On that night the sleep of the king was disturbed" (Esther 6:1)

Rabbi Tanhūm said: the sleep of the King of the universe was disturbed.

And the Sages say: The sleep of the higher ones, the angels, was disturbed, and the sleep of the lower ones, the Jewish people, was disturbed.

Rava said: literally: The sleep of King Ahasuerus was disturbed.

A thought occurred to him [to King Ahasuerus] and he said to himself: What is this before us that Esther has invited Haman? Perhaps they are conspiring against that man, i.e., against me, to kill him.

He [King Ahasuerus] then said again to himself: If this is so, is there no man who loves me and would inform me of this conspiracy?

He [King Ahasuerus] then said again to himself: Perhaps there is some man who has done a favor for me and I have not rewarded him, and due to that reason people refrain from revealing to me.

Immediately afterward, the verse states: "And he [King Ahasuerus] commanded the book of remembrances of the chronicles to be brought" (Esther 6:1).



**Explaining the Story** - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** Based on the story of the Megillah until this point, why do you think the sleep of the King of the universe was disturbed (according to Rabbi Tanhûm)?

**?** Based on the story of the Megillah until this point, why do you think the sleep of the "higher ones" (the angels) was disturbed (according to the Sages)?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Based on the story of the Megillah until this point, why do you think the sleep of the "lower ones" (the Jews) was disturbed (according to the Sages)?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Please explain the thought process of Ahasuerus when his sleep was disturbed?

**Bonus ?** "A thought occurred to him [to King Ahasuerus] and he said to himself: What is this before us that Esther has invited Haman? Perhaps they are conspiring against that man, i.e., against me, to kill him." Can you think of alternative answers to King Ahasuerus' question?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** “Perhaps they are conspiring against that man, i.e., against me, to kill him. He [King Ahasuerus] then said again to himself: If this is so, is there no man who loves me and would inform me of this conspiracy?” Can you think of alternative courses of action by King Ahasuerus after he thinks they are conspiring against him?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** “He [King Ahasuerus] then said again to himself: If this is so, is there no man who loves me and would inform me of this conspiracy? He [King Ahasuerus] then said again to himself: Perhaps there is some man who has done a favor for me and I have not rewarded him, and due to that reason people refrain from revealing to me?” Can you think of alternative courses of action by King Ahasuerus after he concludes that perhaps nobody loves him?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** According to the Talmudic story, why did the king order that the book of the chronicles be brought in and read to him?

**Bonus ?** How is King Ahasuerus described in our story?

## “The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! Was I Ungrateful? A Question Worth Losing Sleep Over!



Our short Talmudic story presents us with a different King Ahasuerus than the one we know from the Megillah. Here King Ahasuerus is not only thinking, but he is also sensitive, humble, aware of his faults, and grateful.

His elaborate thought process leads him to the realization that he has been ungrateful in the past, and immediately he sets himself to correct the wrong by honoring Mordechai.

Our story invites the reader to ask the same question that Ahasuerus asked himself on his sleepless night: Perhaps there is someone who has done a favor for me and I did not thank them properly.

Gratitude is one of the most noble character traits, one that not only will make us better human beings, but will surround us with good friends, who will always be there for us.