

Fill Your Own Cup 5786
Winter Series – Supporting Actors – Zeresh, Haman’s Wife

1) Esther 5:9-14

(9) That day Haman went out happy and lighthearted. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the palace gate, and Mordecai did not rise or even stir on his account, Haman was filled with rage at him. (10) Nevertheless, Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh, (11) and Haman told them about his great wealth and his many sons, and all about how the king had promoted him and advanced him above the officials and the king’s courtiers. (12) “What is more,” said Haman, “Queen Esther gave a feast, and besides the king she did not have anyone but me. And tomorrow too I am invited by her along with the king. (13) Yet all this means nothing to me every time I see that Jew Mordecai sitting in the palace gate.” (14) Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Let a stake be put up, fifty cubits high, and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then you can go gaily with the king to the feast.” The proposal pleased Haman, and he had the stake put up.

אסתר ה': ט'-י"ד

(ט) וַיֵּצֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ בֵּינוֹם הַהוּא שְׂמֵחַ וְטוֹב לֵב וְכִרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּלְאָךְ וְלֹא־קָם וְלֹא־נָע מִמָּוֶה וַיִּמְלֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־מֶרְדֵּכַי חֶמָּה: (י) וַיִּתְאַפֵּק הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיָּבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּבְרָא אֶת־אֶהֱבָיו וְאֶת־נָרְשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ: (יא) וַיִּסְפֹּר לָהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרַב בְּנָיו וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אִדְּלוּ הַמַּלְאָךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ עַל־הַשָּׂרִים וְעַבְדֵי הַמַּלְאָךְ: (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵף לֹא־הִבִּיאָהּ אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עִם־הַמַּלְאָךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה כִּי אִם־אוֹתִי וְגַם־לְמַתָּר אֲנִי קָרוּאָה עִם־הַמַּלְאָךְ: (יג) וְכָל־זֶה אֵינְנוּ שׁוֹהֵ לִי בְּכָל־עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּלְאָךְ: (יד) וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ נָרְשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֶהֱבָיו יַעֲשׂוּ־עִי' גְּבֵהַ חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה וּבִבְקָר וְאֶמֶר לְמַלְאָךְ וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי עָלָיו וּבֹא־עִם־הַמַּלְאָךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה שְׂמֵחַ וַיִּיטֵב הַדְּבָר לְפָנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ הַעֲצָן: {ס}

2) Esther 6: 10-14

“Quick, then!” said the king to Haman. “Get the garb and the horse, as you have said, and do this to Mordecai the Jew, who sits in the king’s gate. Omit nothing of all you have proposed.” So Haman took the garb and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square; and he proclaimed before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor! Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate, while Haman hurried home, his head covered in mourning. There Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had befallen him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him; you will fall before him to your ruin.” While they were still speaking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurriedly brought Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

אסתר ו': י-יד

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַמֵּן מְהֵרָה קַח אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוּס וְכַאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ וַעֲשֵׂה־כֹל לְמֶרְדֵּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי הַיּוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּלְאָךְ אֶל־תִּפְּל דְּבַר מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ: וַיִּקַּח הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוּס וַיַּלְבֹּשׁ אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי וַיַּרְכִּיבֵהוּ בַרְחֻב הָעִיר וַיִּקְרָא לְפָנָיו בְּכֹה יַעֲשֵׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ: וַיָּשֵׁב מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמַּלְאָךְ וְהַמֶּלֶךְ נִדְחַף אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ אָבֵל וְחַפּוּי רֹאשׁ: וַיִּסְפֹּר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְנָרְשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְלְכָל־אֶהֱבָיו אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְנָרְשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ אִם מִזְרַע הַיְּהוּדִים מֶרְדֵּכַי אֲשֶׁר הַחַלּוֹת לְנַפְל לְפָנָיו לֹא־תוּכַל לוֹ כִּי־נָפוּל תִּפּוּל לְפָנָיו: עוֹדֵם מְדַבְּרִים עִמּוֹ וְסָרִיסֵי הַמַּלְאָךְ הִגִּיעוּ וַיִּבְהִלּוּ לְהִבְיֵא אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר:

3) Esther Rabbah 9:2

Among all of them, there was no one capable of giving counsel like Zeresh his wife. He [Haman] had three hundred and sixty-five advisers, corresponding to the days of the solar year. His wife said to him: The person [Mordechai] about whom you are asking, “If he is of the progeny of the Jews...you will not prevail against him” (Esther 6:13) – unless you approach him with cleverness, with [a strategy] that has never been attempted against members of his nation. If you drop him into a fiery furnace, Hananya and his cohorts have already been rescued [from it]; if [you place him in] the lions’ den, Daniel already emerged from it. If you incarcerate him in prison, Joseph already emerged from it. If you ignite a fire in a vat beneath him, Menashe [king of Judah] already pleaded, and the Holy One blessed be He acceded to his plea and he emerged from it. If you exile him to the wilderness, his ancestors already procreated in the wilderness, and they were confronted with numerous ordeals and passed them all and were rescued. If you blind

אסתר רבה ט': ב'

וּבְכֵלָם לֹא הָיוּ יוֹדְעִים לְתַת עֲצָה בְּנָרְשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ, שְׂקִיו לוֹ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וְשִׁשִּׁים וְחֲמִשָּׁה בְּעֵלֵי עֲצָה, כְּמִנְיַן יְמוֹת הַחֹמֶה, אֲמָרָה לוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ אָדָם זֶה שְׂאֵתָה שׂוֹאֵל עָלָיו אִם מִזְרַע הַיְּהוּדִים הוּא, לֹא תוּכַל לוֹ, אִם לֹא תְּבוֹא עָלָיו בְּחֻמְקָה בְּמָה שְׁלֹא נִסָּה אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי אֲמֵתוֹ, שְׂאֵם תִּפְּלוּ לְכַבֵּשׁ הָאֵשׁ, כְּכַר הַצֵּלוּ חֲנַנְיָה וְחַבְרִיו. וְאִם לִגְב אֶרְיוֹת, כְּכַר עֵלָה דְּנִינְאֵל מִתּוֹכוֹ. וְאִם מֵאֶסְרָהוּ בְּבֵית הָאֶסּוּרִים, כְּכַר יֵצֵא יוֹסֵף מִתּוֹכוֹ. וְאִם בְּמִוֶּלֶת תִּסִּיק תַּחֲתָיו, כְּכַר הַתַּחֲנוּן מִנְּשָׂה וַיַּעֲתֵר לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וַיִּנְפֹק מִיְנִיָּה. וְאִם בְּמִדְבָּרָא תִּגְלוּגִיָּה, כְּכַר פָּרוּ וְרַבּוֹ אֲבוֹתָיו בְּמִדְבָּר, וְכַמָּה נְסִיווֹת תִּתְּנוּ וְנִסְּוּ וּבְכֵלָן עָמְדוּ וְנִצְּלוּ. וְאִם עֵינָיו תַּעֲנֵר הָרִי שְׂמִשׁוֹן

<p>his eyes, Samson took numerous Philistine lives when he was blind. Rather, hang him on a gibbet, as no member of his people has survived it. Immediately, “the matter was pleasing to Haman and he prepared the gibbet” (Esther 5:14).</p>	<p>דקטל כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה נִפְשֵׁתָא מִפְּלִשְׁתַּי כַּד עֵוִיר. אֵלָא צְלוּב יְתִיה עַל צְלִיבָא, דְּלֵא אִשְׁכְּחִינוּ חַד מִן עַמּוּי דְּאִשְׁתּוּזִיב מִנִּיהּ, מִיַּד וַיִּיטֵב הַדְּבָר לְפָנֵי הָמָן וַיַּעַשׂ הָעֵץ</p>
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<p>4) Targum Rishon to Esther 5:10 (500-700 CE) And Haman hurried and went to his house, and he sent and called for his friends and <i>Zeresh his wicked wife, the daughter of Tattenai</i>, governor of the region beyond the river.</p>	<p>תרגום אסתר ה'י: וְאֶזְדְּרִיז הָמָן וְעַל לְבִיתִיהּ וַיְשַׁדֵּר וַיִּקְרָא ית רַחִימוּי וַיִּתְּ נִרְשׁ רַשְׁעִיתָא אֲנָתִיתִיהּ בְּרַת תַּתֵּנַי פַּתַּח עֲבָר נְהָרָא:</p>
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<p>5) Ezra 5:3-5 (3) At once <i>Tattenai, governor of the province of Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai</i>, and their colleagues descended upon them and said this to them, “Who issued orders to you to rebuild this house and complete its furnishing?” (4) Then we said to them, “What are the names of the men who are engaged in the building?” (5) But God watched over the elders of the Jews and they were not stopped while a report went to Darius and a letter was sent back in reply to it.</p>	<p>עזרא ה'ג-ה' (ג) בְּהִזְמַנָּא אֶתָּא עֲלֵיהוֹן תַּתֵּנַי פַּתַּח עֲבָר־נְהָרָה וַיִּשְׁתַּר בּוּזְנֵי וַיִּכְנַתְהוּ וְכוּן אֲמַרְיָן לְהֵם מִן־שֵׁם לְכֵם טַעֲם בִּיתָא דְנָה לְבָנָא וְאִשְׁרָנָא דְנָה לְשַׁכְּלָהּ: (ד) (ד) אֲתִין כְּנַמָּא אֲמַרְנָא לְהֵם מִן־אֲנוּן שְׁמַתָּת גְּבַרְיָא דִּי־דְנָה בְּנִנְנָא בְּנִין: (ה) וַעֲיִן אֶלְהֵם הָנָה עַל־שַׁבְּי הַיְהוּדָא וְלֹא־בְטָלוּ הַמּוֹ עַד־טַעֲמָא לְדַרְנִישׁ יְהוּד וְאֲדִין יְתִיבִין נִשְׁתַּנְּבָא עַל־דְנָה: (פ)</p>
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<p>6) Pirkei Derebbe Eliezer 50 Zeresh his wife and all his astrologers said to him: <i>Have you not heard what was done unto Pharaoh?</i> As it is said, "And Zeresh his wife said unto him, If Mordecai, before whom thou hast begun to fall, be of the seed of the Jews, thou shalt not prevail against him" (Esth. 6:13).</p>	<p>פרקי דרבי אליעזר נ אֲמַרְהּ לוֹ זֵרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל אַסְטְרוֹלוֹגִין שְׁלוֹ: שְׁמַעַתָּ מַה עָשׂוּ לְפָרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם? "אִם מִזְרַע הַיְהוּדִים מְרַדְכֵי אִשְׁרַי הַחַלּוֹת לְנַפְל לְפָנָיו – לֹא תוּכַל לוֹ, כִּי נְכוּל תַּפּוּל לְפָנָיו."</p>
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7) Vashti: Feminist or Foe? By Tzvi Sinensky - March 6, 2019
<https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/vashti-feminist-or-foe/>

Perhaps even more surprising than the rabbinic portrayal of Vashti is the extent to which their depiction of Zeresh, Haman’s wife, echoes that of Vashti. As in the case of Vashti, *Hazal* view Zeresh as wicked. *Esther Rabbah* (10:9) records in the name of Rav that “one is required to say cursed is Haman, cursed are his sons, cursed is Zeresh his wife. As it states, and the name of the wicked shall rot.” This is echoed by the hymn “*Shoshanat Yaakov*,” in which we declare that “Cursed is Zeresh, wife of the one who inflicted fear.” *Targum Yerushalmi* (to *Esther* 10:5) bluntly calls Zeresh Haman’s “wicked wife,” identifying her as the daughter of Tattenai the governor, who questions the Jews’ right to rebuild the Temple (see *Ezra* 5:3). Just as Zeresh’s father stalls the rebuilding efforts, Vashti is similarly credited by the rabbis with having discouraged Ahashveirosh from permitting the resumption of the Temple’s reconstruction.

Despite the rabbis’ vilification of Zeresh, the *Megillah* itself attributes to Zeresh a significant degree of insight. The text records that Zeresh and Haman’s friends recommend that he build a gallows on which to hang Mordechai (*Esther* 5:14). Later, Haman’s “advisors and his wife Zeresh said to him, ‘If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him; you will fall before him to your ruin’” (*Esther* 6:13). In both cases, Zeresh and the friends’ or advisors’ counsel is decisive. Building on the text but taking a dramatic step further, the Midrash maintains that Zeresh’s insight exceeds that of all Haman’s advisors...

A striking resemblance emerges in the midrashic accounting of Vashti and Zeresh’s stories: both are wicked individuals descended from hateful ancestors, yet they easily surpass their husbands’ intelligence. Both are accursed, for they used their intelligence to ignoble ends. Yet this does not stop the Rabbis from seeing the sheer intelligence possessed by both and comparing them favorably with their husbands, and, explicitly for Zeresh and implicitly for Vashti, all of his male advisors. What is more, the parallel to Zeresh suggests that the women’s intelligence is not merely set in contrast to their husband’s imbecility – Haman, all indications suggest, was anything but unintelligent – but is significant in its own respect.