

## TORAH THOUGHTS – PURIM AND SEXUALITY

Purim celebrates a Jewish heroine, Esther, who bravely defended her people in their time of need. Yet much of the story describes both subtle and explicit sexual situations. Although women are objectified throughout the story, the Bible teaches through the actions of Esther and Vashti that this is not only wrong but dangerous.

Here is a plot summary of chapter one of the Book of Esther, which we read on Wednesday, March 20, at 7:00 pm. Discuss the scene and questions with family and/or friends – what lessons is the text relating to us?

1. King Achashveraus had a huge party, and demanded that Queen Vashti dance for his guests, and display her beauty. She refused.
2. The king was angry and consulted with his advisors on what to do.
3. Memuchan said that Vashti sinned not only against the king but against all the people in his kingdom. Women will hear of her refusal and will also disobey their husbands!
4. He suggested that they search for a new queen, sending a message to wives to treat their husbands with respect.

## QUESTIONS

1. The biblical narrator implies that the king was out of line. Describe positive ways that men and women can interact and ask for help.
2. What do you think of Vashti's refusal?
3. What do you think of Memuchan's advice?

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Do you think the objectification of women is a problem in our culture? Why or why not? If yes, what can be done to combat it? How has the #MeToo movement exposed boorish behavior like the king's?
2. Physical beauty is seen as positive in Judaism; biblical characters including Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Esther, David, and Absalom are described as being extremely beautiful or handsome. However, it is only one aspect of our humanity. Esther becomes the new queen by winning a beauty contest, but her personality also wins people over. Consider further this verse from the

Book of Proverbs. “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain. But a God-fearing woman is to be praised.” (31:30) What do you think?

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont