

ESTHER

1. The verse states: **“And he had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther”** (Esther 2:7). **She is referred to as “Hadassah” and she is referred to as “Esther.” It is taught: Rabbi Meir says: Esther was her real name. Why then was she called Hadassah? On account of the righteous, who are called myrtles [*hadassim*], and so it states: “And he stood among the myrtles [*hahadassim*]”** (Zechariah 1:8).

Rabbi Yehuda differs and says: Hadassah was her real name. Why then was she called Esther? Because she concealed [*masteret*] the truth about herself, as it is stated: “Esther had not yet made known her kindred nor her people” (Esther 2:20).

Rabbi Neḥemya concurs and says: Hadassah was her real name. Why then was she called Esther? This was her non-Hebrew name, **for** owing to her beauty **the nations of the world called her after Istahar, Venus. Ben Azzai says: Esther was neither tall nor short, but of average size like a myrtle tree, and therefore she was called Hadassah. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korḥa said: Esther was called Hadassah because she was greenish, having a pale complexion like a myrtle, but a cord of Divine grace was strung around her, endowing her with a beautiful appearance.** (Megillah 13a)

2. **“And the seven maids chosen to be given her out of the king’s house”** (Esther 2:9). **Rava said: She would have a separate maid attend her each day, and she would count the days of the week by them, so she was always aware when Shabbat was. The verse continues: “And he advanced her and her maids to the best place in the house of the women.” Rav said: The advancement in the verse signals that he fed her food of Jews.**

And Shmuel said: The advancement was a well-intentioned act in **that he fed her pig hinds,** thinking she would view it as a delicacy.

And Rabbi Yoḥanan said: He gave her **vegetables. And so it states** with regard to the kindness done for Daniel and his associates: **“So the steward took away their food and the wine that they should drink; and gave them vegetables”** (Daniel 1:16). (Megillah 13a)

3. **“And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all those who looked upon her”** (Esther 2:15). **Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that she appeared to each and every one as if she were a member of his own nation, and therefore she obtained favor in the eyes of all. “So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month Tevet”** (Esther 2:16). (Megillah 13a)

4. **“Then the king made a great feast** for all his princes and his servants, even Esther’s feast” (Esther 2:18). The Gemara explains that this was part of an attempt to have Esther reveal her true identity. **He made a great feast** in her honor, **but she did not reveal her identity to him. He lowered the taxes [karga]** in her name, **but still she did not reveal it to him. He sent gifts [pardishenei]** to the ministers in her name, **but even so she did not reveal it to him.**

“And when the virgins were gathered together the second time and Mordecai sat in the king’s gate” (Esther 2:19). The reason Ahasuerus gathered the women together was that **he went and took advice from Mordecai** as to what he should do to get Esther to reveal her identity. Mordecai **said** to him: As a rule, **a woman is jealous only of the thigh of another** woman. Therefore, you should take for yourself additional women. **But even so she did not reveal her origins to him, as it is written: “Esther had not yet made known her kindred nor her people”** (Esther 2:20). (Megillah 13a)

5. **“For Esther adhered to the words of Mordecai,** as she did when she was brought up with him” (Esther 2:20). **Rabi Yirmeya said:** This teaches **that she would show** discharges of her **menstrual blood to the Sages** to inquire whether she was pure or impure. The verse continues: **“As she did when she was brought up with him”** (Esther 2:20). **Rabba bar Lima said in the name of Rav:** This means **that she maintained a relationship with Mordecai, as she would arise from the lap of Ahasuerus, immerse herself in a ritual bath, and sit in the lap of Mordecai.** (Megillah 13b)

6. **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). (Megillah 14b)

7. **There were four women of extraordinary beauty in the world: Sarah, and Abigail, Rahab, and Esther. And according to the one who said that Esther was greenish in color, remove Esther from the list and insert Vashti in her place.** (Megillah 15a)

8. **“But Esther still did not reveal her kindred or her people.”** (Esther 2:20)

This teaches that she put a ban of silence on herself like her ancestress Rachel who also put a ban of silence on herself. (Esther Rabbah 6:12)

9. Esther sent a message to Mordecai: **“Go, gather together all the Jews** who are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night and day; I also and my maidens will fast likewise, and so will I go in to the king, **not according to the custom”** (Esther 4:16). **Rabbi Abba said: It will not be according to my usual custom, for every day until now** when I submitted myself to Ahasuerus it was **under compulsion, but now** I will be submitting myself to him **of my own free will**. And Esther further said: **“And if I perish, I perish”** (Esther 4:16). What she meant was: **Just as I was lost to my father’s house, so too, shall I be lost to you**, for after voluntarily having relations with Ahasuerus, I shall be forever forbidden to you. (Megillah 15a)

10. “Go and gather all the Jews who live in Shushan and fast on my behalf.” (Esther 4:16)

And at that time, Esther was very scared because of the evil that had grown in Israel and she took off the clothing of her royalty and splendor and wore sackcloth, and she uncovered the hair of her head and covered it with dust and ashes, and she afflicted herself with fasting. And she fell on her face in front of the Lord and prayed and said, "Lord, God of Israel, who has ruled from the days of yore and created the world, please help Your maidservant, as I was orphaned without father or mother and am comparable to a poor woman who goes to beg from house to house; so do I beg Your mercy, from window to window in the house of Ahasuerus. And now, Lord, please give success to Your maidservant - this poor woman – and the flock of Your shepherding from these enemies that have risen against us, as You have no impediment from saving with the many or with the few. And, You, O Father of orphans, please stand to the right of this orphan, who trusted in Your kindness, and give me mercy in front of this man, as I feared him; and bring him low in front of me, as you bring the proud ones low." (Esther Rabbah 8:6)

11. The Sages taught: What did Esther see to invite Haman to the banquet? Rabbi Elazar says: She hid a snare for him, as it is stated: “Let their table become a snare before them” (Psalms 69:23).

Rabbi Yehoshua says: She learned to do this from the Jewish teachings of her father’s house, as it is stated: “If your enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat...You will be heaping live coals on his head”. (Proverbs 25:21-22). **Rabbi Meir says: She invited him in order** that he be near her at all times, **so that he would not take counsel and rebel** against Ahasuerus.

Rabbi Yehuda says: She invited Haman so that it not be found out that she was a Jew, as had she distanced him, he would have become suspicious. **Rabbi Nehemya says: She did this so that the Jewish people would not say: We have a sister in the king’s house, and consequently neglect their prayers for divine mercy.** **Rabbi Yosei says: She acted in this manner, so that Haman would always be on hand for her.** **Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya said** that Esther said to herself: **Perhaps the Omnipresent will take notice** that all are supporting Haman and nobody is supporting the Jewish people, **and He will perform for us a miracle.**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korḥa says: She said to herself: **I will act kindly toward him** and thereby bring the king to suspect that we are having an affair; she did so **in order that both he and she would be killed.** **Rabban Gamliel says:** Ahasuerus **was a fickle king,** and Esther hoped that if he saw Haman on multiple occasions, eventually he would change his opinion of him. **Rabban Gamliel said:** **We still need** the words of Rabbi Eliezer **HaModa'i** to understand why Esther invited Haman to her banquet. **As it is taught: Rabbi Eliezer HaModa'i says: She made the king jealous of him and she made the other ministers jealous of him.**

Rabba says: Esther invited Haman to her banquet in order to fulfill that which is stated: **“Pride goes before destruction”** (Proverbs 16:18). It can be understood according to **Abaye and Rava,** who both say that she invited Haman in order to fulfill the verse: **“When they are heated, I will make feasts for them,** and I will make them drunk, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep” (Jeremiah 51:39). **Rabba bar Avuh** once **happened upon Elijah** the Prophet and **said to him: In accordance with whose understanding did Esther see fit to act in this manner? He, Elijah, said to him:** Esther was motivated by all the reasons previously mentioned and did so **for all** the reasons stated by the tanaim and amoraim. (Megillah 15b)

12. R. Berekiah said: The Holy One, blessed be He, had already accorded the deliverance of Israel in the Torah, as it is written, “And if a stranger who is a settler with you be waxen rich (Leviticus 25:47). This refers to Haman who became rich and could afford to pay out ten thousand shekels of silver...this refers to Israel who were poor and needy...because Ahasuerus sold them to Haman to destroy, to slay and to cause to perish....because the Holy One, blessed be He, redeemed them from his decree and ransomed them. “One of his brethren shall redeem him.”(Ibid): this is Mordecai. “Or his uncle or his uncle’s son shall redeem him.”(Leviticus 25:49): this refers to Esther who was the daughter of his uncle and through whom Israel were redeemed. (Esther Rabbah 10:13)