

MORDECAI

1. **"There was a certain Jew in Shushan the castle, whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair the son of Shimei the son of Kish, a Benjamite"** (Esther 2:5). The Gemara asks: **What is it conveying in the verse by saying the names of Mordecai's ancestors? If the verse comes to trace his ancestry, it should continue tracing his lineage back all the way to Benjamin. Rather, what is different about these names that they deserve special mention?**

A Sage taught: All of them are names by which Mordecai was called. He was called **"the son of Jair"** because he was **the son who enlightened [heir] the eyes of all of the Jewish people with his prayers;** **"the son of Shimei"** because he was **the son whom God heard [shama] his prayers;** **"the son of Kish"** because he **knocked [hikish] on the gates of mercy and they were opened to him.**

Mordecai is referred to as a **"Jew [Yehudi]"**, apparently indicating that he came from the tribe of Judah, but in the continuation of the verse he is called **"Benjamite" [Yemini]**, which indicates that he came from the tribe of Benjamin. Rav Nahman said: Mordecai was crowned with honorary names.

Rabba bar bar Hana said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Mordecai's father was from the tribe of Benjamin, and his mother was from the tribe of Judah. And the Rabbis say that **The families competed with each other over which tribe could take credit for Mordecai. The family of Judah would say: I caused the birth of Mordecai, as only because David did not kill Shimei, the son of Gera, when he cursed him (see II Samuel 16) was it possible for Mordecai to be born later from his descendants. And the family of Benjamin said in response: In the end he came from me.**

Rava said: **The Congregation of Israel at the time said this from the opposite perspective, remarking: See what a Judean has done to me and how a Benjamite has repaid me. What a Judean has done to me** is referring to the responsibility of Judah, as **David did not kill Shimei**, although he was liable to the death penalty. The grave consequences of this failure included that **Mordecai was born from him**, and it was he **against whom Haman was jealous. And how a Benjamite has repaid me** is referring to the fact that **Saul**, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, **did not kill the Amalekite king Agag immediately, from whom Haman was later born, and he caused suffering to the Jewish people.**

Rabbi Yohanan said a different explanation of the verse: **Actually, Mordecai came from the tribe of Benjamin. Why, then, was he referred to as Yehudi? On account of the fact that he repudiated idol worship, for anyone who repudiates idolatry is called Yehudi. as it is written: "There are certain Jews [Yehuda'in] whom thou hast appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylonia, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not regarded you: They serve not your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:12).** These three individuals were in fact Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who were not all from the tribe of Judah but are referred to as *Yehuda'in* because they repudiated idol worship. (Megillah 12b-13a)

2. **"In the fortress Shushan lived a Jew by the name of Mordecai."** (Esther 2:5)

The word 'man' here tells us that Mordecai in his generation was equal to Moses in his; for of Moses too it is written: **"Now the man Moses was very meek"** (Numbers 12:3). Just as Moses stood in the breach, as it is written: **"Therefore he said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach"** (Psalms 106:23), so did Mordecai, as it is written: **"He sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of his kindred."** (Esther 10:3). Just as Moses taught Israel Torah, as it is written: **"Behold I have taught you statutes and ordinances (Deuteronomy 4:5), so did Mordecai, as it is written: "And he sent letters... with words of peace and truth (Esther 9:30), and truth means Torah, as it is written: "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23) ... Some say that Mordecai was equal to Abraham in his generation. Just as our father Abraham allowed himself to be cast into the fiery furnace and converted his fellowmen and made them acknowledge the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says "And the souls which they had made in Haran (Genesis 12:5), so in the days of Mordecai men acknowledged the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says "And many from among the peoples of the land became Jews (Esther 8:17), and he proclaimed the unity of God's name and sanctified it. Thereupon he was called Yehudi, as it says, "A Judean man" (Esther 2:5); read not *Yehudi* but *yehidi*. (Esther Rabbah 6:2)**

3. Rav Nahman said: Malachi the prophet is in fact Mordecai, and why was he called Malachi? To indicate that he was second to the king. (Megillah 15a)

4. "Who had been exiled from Jerusalem" (Esther 2:6)

Rava said: This language indicates that he went into exile on his own. (Megillah 13a)

5. **"For she had neither father nor mother"** (Esther 2:7). **Why do I need "And when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter"?** Rav Aha said: When her mother became pregnant with her, her father died, and when she gave birth to her, her mother died, so that she did not have a mother or a father for even a single day.

The verse states: **"And when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter"** (Esther 2:7). A *tanna* taught a *baraita* in the name of Rabbi Meir: Do not read the verse literally as **for a daughter [bat]**, but rather read it as **for a home [bayit]**. This indicates that Mordecai took Esther to be his wife. And so it states: **"But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and reared: And it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his bread, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was like a daughter [kevat] to him"** (II Samuel 12:3). The Gemara questions: **Because it lay in his bosom, it "was like a daughter to him"?** Rather, the phrase should be read: **Like a home [bayit] to him**, i.e., a wife. So too, here, Mordecai took her for a home, i.e., a wife. (Megillah 13a)

6. What did Mordecai say to those who asked him **"Why do you disobey the king's order?"** (Esther 3:3) R. Levi said: He said to them: Our master Moses admonished us in the Torah saying: **"Cursed be the man who makes a graven or molten image."** (Deuteronomy 27:15); and this wretch sets himself up as a deity... What is more, I am the elect of the Holy One, blessed be He, since all the tribes were born outside the holy land, but my ancestor was born in the Land of Israel. (Esther Rabbah 7:8)

7. When this letter was signed and delivered to Haman, he and all his associates went in rejoicing. As it happened, Mordecai was just then walking in front of him. He saw three children coming from school and ran after them. So they followed Mordecai to see what he would ask the children. When Mordecai met the children, he asked them to repeat the lessons they had learned... When Mordecai heard this he smiled and was exceedingly glad. Said Haman to him: Why are you so glad over the words of these children? He replied: Because of the glad tidings they have given me that I should not fear the evil design which you have formed against us. Forthwith the wicked Haman grew angry and said: I will lay hand on these children first of all. (Esther Rabbah 7:13)

8. **"At that time, when Mordecai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to do away with King Ahasuerus"** (Esther 2:21)

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said that Rabbi Yohanan said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, caused a master to become angry with his servants in order to fulfill the will of a righteous man. And who is this? It is Joseph, as it is stated **"And there was with us there a young man, a Hebrew"** (Genesis 41:12).

Similarly, the Holy One, Blessed be He, also caused servants to become angry with their master in order to perform a miracle for another righteous man. And who is he? It is Mordecai, as it is written: **"And the matter became known to Mordecai"** (Esther 2:22).

Rabbi Yohanan said: Bigthan and Teresh were two Tarsians, and they would talk with one another in the Tarsian language. They said: **From the day that Esther arrived we have not slept**, as Ahasuerus has been with Esther all night, and he has been busying us with his demands. Come, let us cast poison in the goblet from which he drinks so that he will die. But they did not know that Mordecai was one of those who sat on the Sanhedrin, which convened in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, and that he knew seventy languages. (Megillah 13b)

9. **"When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry"**

(Esther 4:1). The Gemara asks: **What did Mordecai say** when he cried out? **Rav said:** He said that **Haman has risen above Ahasuerus. And Shmuel said: The upper King has prevailed over the lower king.** In other words, it would appear that Ahasuerus, the lower king, has prevailed over the higher King, God in Heaven, Who desires good for the Jewish people. (Megillah 15a)

10. There is a dispute with regard to the meaning of the verse: **“So Mordecai passed [vaya’avor]”** (Esther 4:17). **Rav said:** This means **that he passed the first day of Passover as a fast day**, understanding the word *vaya’avor* in the sense of sin [*aveira*], as by doing so he transgressed the obligation to rejoice on the Festival. **And Shmuel said:** It means **that he crossed over [avar] a stream** in order to bring the message to all. (Megillah 15a)

11. “Mordecai left the king’s presence in royal apparel.” (Esther 8:15)

R. Pinchas says: Mordecai was the king of the Jews. A king wears purple and Mordecai wore purple; a king has a crown encircling his head and Mordecai was arrayed “with a magnificent crown of gold” (Ibid); the fear of the king is over all the land and so the fear of Mordecai was upon them, as it says: “Because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them.” (Esther 9:3); a king’s coinage is current in the land and Mordecai’s coinage was current. What was the coinage of Mordecai? It had Mordecai on one side and Esther on the other. Why all of this? Because he was a good man and a man of peace and he sought peace (Esther 10:3) (Esther Rabbah 10:12)

12. **“For Mordecai the Jew was second to the king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted by the majority of his brethren”** (Esther 10:3). The Gemara comments: The verse indicates that Mordecai was accepted only **“By the majority of his brethren,” but not by all his brethren.** This teaches that some members of the Sanhedrin parted from him, because he occupied himself with community needs, and was therefore compelled to neglect his Torah study.

Rav Yosef said: Studying Torah is greater than saving lives, as initially, Mordecai was mentioned after four other people, but at the end he was listed after five. This is taken to indicate that his involvement in governmental affairs instead of in Torah study lowered his stature one notch. The Gemara proves this: **At first it is written: “Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan”** (Ezra 2:2); **but in the end in a later list it is written: “Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahmani, Mordecai, Bilshan”** (Nehemiah 7:7). (Megillah 16b)