ESTHER 6:12 What You Wish For Others…

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Chapter 6 of Megillat Esther tells us that after the first banquet that Queen Esther prepared for Ahashverosh, and for an unexpected guest, Haman, the king was not able to sleep. The King is consumed with jealousy or suspicion, thinking that Haman might easily find allies among the guards who had access to the king, or among the servants who could poison his food, etc. In his unusual insomnia, the King requests to bring the book of the Chronicles, the official historical records that were written by the historians of the Empire. The King was interested to find the records of his rewards to those who had protected him, informing about possible attacks on his life. Being generous with the informants loyal to the king was essential for others to imitate this gesture. And the king wanted to make sure that in these uncertain moments, the King's subjects knew of his generosity. Thus, the King finds out that five years ago, Mordekhai, the Jew, uncovered the plot of Bigtana and Teresh, two treasure guards who sought to poison the king. The King asked if Mordechai had been rewarded in any way for this, and his servants told him "no". At dawn, just before the King gave the order to reward Mordechai, Haman arrives at the palace. What was Haman doing so early in the palace? In the previous chapter we saw that Haman was consumed with rage upon seeing Mordekhai not kneeling before him. The main reason for celebrating Purim is that the mega-revenge that Haman plans to retaliate against Mordechai, the extermination of his people, was miraculously thwarted . And the wicked Haman thought that his revenge would be more pleasant if Mordekhai saw with his own eyes the death of his people, and that is why he left him alive. But now Haman

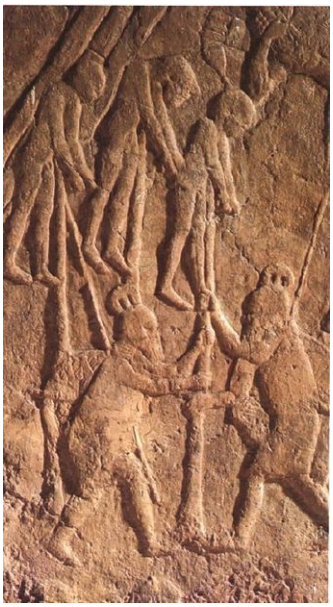
confesses to his wife and friends that he can no longer bear the presence of Mordekhai. His wife, Zeresh, suggests Haman to go and see the King in the morning and "denounce" Mordekhai, so that he would be immediately executed. But what was Haman going to accuse Mordechai of? The text does not provide us with any details. According to Professor Yonathan Grossman, Haman was advised by his wife Zeresh to accuse Mordekhai of "high treason". Where can we see a hint to this? Grossman shows the similarity between the words the text uses when Zeresh speaks to her husband Haman, and the words that Izebel used when speaking to her husband King Ahab (I Kings 21: 4-7).

Ahab, one of the Kings of the Kingdom of Israel (ca. 900-850 BC) desired the vineyard of his neighbor, a Jew named Naboth. The King offered to pay for Nabot's land, but Nabot did not want to sell his inheritance. Ahab became depressed, and his wife Izebel – a Phoenician woman who did not respect Jewish laws at all – bribed two witnesses to falsely accuse Nabot of cursing the King, an act of treason against the King. Taking advantage of the prevalent corruption of Ahab's government, Izebel managed to get the judges to condemn Naboth, execute him and confiscate his vineyard, which became now available to the King. (□□□□ □□□□□□ ,□□□□□□ □□□□□).

Grossman explains that although the text of Esther does not mention these details explicitly, we can deduce from the allusions to the text of Ahab that Zeresh and Haman had in mind a similar plan: to falsely accuse Mordekhai of treason, and proceed to his immediate execution. When Haman arrived in the morning to the palace he was probably with a couple of false witnesses, ready to execute his plan. Haman was so sure of the success of his mission, that before leaving his house he ordered to erect a pole 25 meters high, to execute Mordechai.

Incidentally, the traditional form of execution of traitors in the Persian Empire was not the gallows, as it is usually understood from the conventional translations, but

“impalement”. This terrible form of execution consisted in piercing the body with a sharp stick, and leaving the victim to bleed to death (see THIS). This horrible form of torture/ execution was practiced by the Assyrians and later adopted by the Persians. A few reliefs have been found that illustrate this execution



This illustration shows the impalement of Jews from Lakhish □”□, who were executed by Sanherib, King of Assyria, in 701 BCE.

Apparently Bigtana and Teresh were also executed in this way. Haman wanted to execute Mordekhai in this way. The kind of execution and the unusual height of the pole – the height of an eight or nine story building– are an additional evidence that Haman’s plan was to accuse Mordekhai of high treason. Keeping in mind that the Empire wanted the execution of the traitors to be as public as possible, so that nobody would dare to act against the King.

In the end, as we read in Megillat Ester, *venahafokh hu*, everything turned upside down for the enemies of Israel. Haman was subjected to the same horrible execution he wished for Mordekhai, in the same pole that he prepared for Mordekhai. And the evidence of Haman’s treason? Ahashverosh (falsely? mistakenly? childishly?) accused Haman of “courting his wife”, Queen Ester. And that’s high treason; punishable by impalement

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