

The Book of Esther - Rabbi Yosef Serebryanski

Purim - Feminine and Masculine

The story of Queen Esther (her given name was Haddasah), as told in the scroll of Esther, is read on the festival of Purim. Many aspects of her personal life are not widely known as they are not recorded in the scroll. However, some of them are recorded in ancient Jewish texts. From these we learn that her father died the day after impregnating her mother. This is similar to that which occurred in story of Ruth. Her husband Boaz died the morning after she became impregnated by him.

However, Esther's story differed greatly as her mother died in childbirth, which was not all that uncommon in those times. Thus, she never knew either of her parents, a difficult yet character-building fact that she overcame. As Haddasah was orphaned, Mordechai (a family member) assumed responsibility for her.

Mordechai and Esther were direct descendants of King Saul, the first King of Israel. The prophet Samuel instructed King Saul to completely wipe out Amalek. He did not complete the obligation. As his descendants, Mordechai and Esther became responsible in the chain to do their part to fulfill this obligation.

Esther exemplified all of the attributes of a woman. Her work was enhanced by her excellent rapport in working with her partner Mordechai. Although Mordechai had opinions of his own, he knew exactly when to listen to Esther. He recognized the fact that she had vision, and that this "gift" enabled her to direct them both in accomplishing their purpose. Their partnership was based on the ability each of them had to appreciate and capitalize on the strength and blessings of the other.

The Jewish sages teach that redemption is based on the merits of righteous women. This may explain their belief that in the future, the books of the prophets will cease to be relevant with the exception of the Book of Esther. As the Book of Esther represents a story of concealment and revelation, it is most pertinent to the history leading to the redemption.

People often equate feminine traits to a woman and masculine traits to men. The Hebrew word for man is "ish – איש" and for woman is "ishoh - אשה". In fact, the

Hebrew word for masculine is *zochor* – זכר, while the feminine is *n'kayvoh* - נקבה. The words man and woman reflect separate physical beings, whereas masculine and feminine are an intrinsic part of each person, albeit in varying degrees in this existence.

The imbalance within each person of feminine and masculine power causes personal problems and issues to surface. An important lesson to learn is that judgement should not be about right or wrong. Rather, it is to be utilized in order to bring about internal balance in each situation. Each person is who they are. The main challenge is how to find internal and external balance as well as the proper expression for that soul.

In the Torah portion that is studied universally this week, we find examples of the importance of combining the feminine with the masculine.

(Leviticus 6:2) “Command Aharon and his sons saying: This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall remain on flame on the Altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar will continue burning with it.”

The same sentence can also be translated as: **“Connect Aharon and his sons through expressing zohs (זוה) as the guidance of the elevation, (the letters) hea - הוא - is the elevation because the flames have burnt (the Temple), during this time of darkness until the time of dawn, after which the fire of the Temple will burn in him (each person.)”**

The common translation of the sentence uses the word “it.” However, in Hebrew every word is either masculine or feminine. Thus, the word “it” must be defined either by its feminine or masculine characteristic.

In this verse which is speaking to men the letters of the word “hea” are written in masculine form yet pronounced according to the feminine expression. This combination of masculine and feminine quality is reflective of an existent balance. The letters are masculine while the movement is feminine. This signifies that the future depends on the male being what he is and accepting the feminine that elevates him.

In the Torah the names of animals and birds, are not gender defined, one name often defines both. For example, the names camel, rabbit, pig, pigeon and turtle-dove, use the same word for male or female. Even in the places where there are specific male and female descriptions for an animal, the Torah may utilize the male word for female or female word for male.

Therefore, at times the Torah has to specify if it means only male or only female. In general the letter hey is added to make the word feminine. (Yet there are exceptions as when referring to a goat the Torah has to state if it is male or female and does not use the letter hey.)

While there is a male and female aspect within all aspects of existence, the Torah consistently focuses on the distinction only in regard to Humans. The reason for this is that it is interference and reaction between human beings that cause most of the world's imbalances. That should alert us to the need for us to focus on the importance of maintaining balance in all of our movements (dealings).

The rule is that when a sentence or subject is masculine or feminine the grammatical gender definition in the sentence continues in the same gender. Of course, some exceptions can be found where a sentence that begins in feminine format continues or ends up talking about a male (or a sentence that begins in masculine format continues or ends up talking about a female.) Or it may begin with female go into male and return to female as in the scroll of Esther (4:4.)

In Kabbalah another angle of perception regarding the word "hea" is as follows. The letter hey - ה - and vov - ו - are taken from the Divine name YHVH and what remains is only the letter yood - י -. The letter alef - א - is taken from the word Keesay - כסא - meaning a chair or throne leaving the word Kees or kos. In Exodus (17:16) it says "key yod ahl kase yo" reflecting the lack of the above three letters, that the Divine name and throne is incomplete due to the battles that we have in this existence.

The sentence in Exodus (17:16) is translated as **"The hand is on God's throne, God will remain at war with Amalek from generation to generation."** Another way to translate these words is: **"The (letter) yood י with (the letters) chof samech**

כּ (associated with the letters) **yh ה**, **are a conflict for YHVH with Amalek in each generation.**” This is the mission that King Saul and his descendants were charged with the responsibility to handle.

In Hebrew there are no letters that serve as vowels. The vowels or movements are symbols that are placed below, above or in front of a letter. The letters "הוא" are used in words to extend the length of the vowel as they remain silent in the word. Thus, these letters bring a depth or compassion to the words in which they exist. This is an area that is part of the feminine existence.

The important thing to remember is that each person is able to activate a gender balance within. Yet the descriptive word will reflect the strength of the defining gender only.

In Hebrew the first letter of the word for masculine (zochor) is zayin ז. The first letter of the word for feminine (n'kayvoh) is noon נ. The letter noon 'נ' has a different shape when used at the end of a word to 'ן.' Placed together the letters zayin and noon “זן” (zon) means ‘sustain.’ The word “Zayin” also means ‘protection.’

‘Zayin’ is the first letter of the word “Zohs - זאח” as mentioned above in Leviticus. “Zohs” is a feminine possessive expression. Even though the word “Zohs” is a feminine expression, the spelling of the word “הוא” which reflects the masculine, is read in the feminine form of “hea” to show its complicity with the feminine.

The name of the letter zayin - ז - is also a name used to describe the crowns on top of specific letters that are in the Torah, that are not added onto regular printed block letters. The word for crown is Kesser or Ketter - כתר -. Two of the letters, chof and raish - כר - are used in the word “kesser” (crown) as well as in the word “Zochor” (male). The difference in lettering that exists between the two words is but two letters. They are the letter ‘zayin’ at the beginning of the word “zochor” and the letter ‘tov’ in the word “kesser.”

The word car - כר – has many different meanings. The following is a list of definitions: “a pillow”, “something that is used to lay on”, “loaf of bread”, “pasture”, “fat sheep”, “weight”, “plot of land”, “dependable people” (as in Kings

2. 11:19). It also signifies “a ruler”, “person of power” or “messenger” (as in Isaiah 16:1). All of these words are related to something that is either full, pumped up or fulfilling either in feeling or responsibility.

Adding the letter “zayin” to “car” results in the word “zochor –זכר” which means male. “Zochor” also means ‘remember.’ One reason man is called zochor is that he must remember the source of life and connect with it, and not allow himself to become obsessed in his own abilities or limited perception(s).

When we add the the letter “tov ת” to “car” placing it between the chof and raish it makes the word “kesser” - crown. The forms of the letters in this word give the following flow. First we have the letter Chof - כ which is open in a direction showing forward movement. The middle letter tov - ת is open underneath. This is the same opening underneath as crown that allows it to be placed upon or over something. The raish - ר faces forward but has no bottom. This reflects a combination or the opening of the previous letters. This can be a strong positive force or used to bring imbalance. This is also reflected in a crown which is a powerful encompassing energy that can be used in a positive or negative way.

Another word that can come from the extension of the word car is the word “kapporoh” – ‘כפרה’ – which translates as “atonement” or space of forgiveness. When a person is “zach” - זך - pure and innocent, the person is close to kapporoh. The letter chof כ changes shape at the end of a word to ך. The word זך which is formed by combining the first two letters of “zochor (male)” can be read as an abbreviation that refers to a male arriving in this world with an immediate need for atonement. The female comes into this world clean. This is alluded to in the formation of the word feminine - נקבה. The sages explain that the Hebrew word n’kayvoh - נקבה, can also be read as ‘nekiah’ ‘bo’oh.’ The translation of this term is that she comes clean into this world.

The letters of the word kapporoh are fascinating. We spoke earlier of the letter yood - י - remaining from the Divine name. When the “yood” is added to the Chof - כ - it becomes the letter pey פ. When the letter “yood is added to the raish - ר -

that letter becomes hey ה. The four letters together “cap” and “rah” form the word kapporoh כפרה.

The letter yood reflects the Divine spark. When a person is full and satiated in the physical or spiritual the result is they often become lethargic. This ends with them staying in a space that never changes as they become more and more satisfied with their empty joy. This prevents them from desiring to connect with the source of movement which they are lacking. When they wake up and realize that they must connect, a transformation occurs that elevates everything to its source, bringing with it full forgiveness and atonement for that which remains in the lower vibration of existence.

The word “n’kayvoh” – ‘נקבה’ (feminine) is comprised of four letters. Three of them spell the word clean נקה. The other letter is the bais - ב. The Torah (Genesis 1:1) begins with the letter bais. In Hebrew the first word reads bais rayshis. This comes to state that there are two important flows or elements in everything of this existence, one masculine and the other feminine. The words in Amos (6:1) are “nookvay rayshis” meaning the best (as the verse rayshis gevurosom Jeremiah 49:35.) reflecting that the feminine brings out the best in creation.

Yet we all have our role to play – our piece of the puzzle. When we accept our assignment with love and are secure in the knowledge that all is driven by the source of life, we will arrive at our proper place in a perfect and timely manner.

The Book of Esther is interesting.

Esther means concealment. It can also mean contradiction. This can give her purpose many different representations. One can be that life at that time was a contradiction to Judaism, and belief in One God. It means that Esther was placed in a position where she had to behave in direct contradiction to what she was taught. It can mean that when she tried to exercise the lifestyle of goodness on which she was raised, that it resulted in bad things happening to her. Or it can mean that everything about her was concealed. Her name was actually Hadassah.

Mordechai was a descendant of King Saul. On his mother's side he descended from the tribe of Judah.

The King's given name was Artaxerxes not Ahashverosh. Often people in the Bible were not referred to by their actual names. Rather they were known by a term that represented a description of what they did or how they behaved.

What was Esther's relationship with Mordechai? Some say that she was his niece and some say that they were married. Interesting that the King might have taken a woman who was already married to be his wife. It would seem that for the king no woman was considered beyond his reach.

Let us look at this situation from a Kabbalistic perspective. There were many people who using specific powers in creation were able to create an animal or a human. This is mentioned in reference to Abraham using Sefer Yetzirah, Jacobs's sons, Rabbah in the Talmud, the famous Maharal of Prague, etc. This also mentioned in reference to Esther, that Mordechai, using his God given powers, created a physical woman who slept with the King in her stead. Creating such a "Golem" prevented his wife from having to sleep with the King. It was also a reason that he had to visit the woman's quarter's daily to check on the Golem.

However, when the time came for Esther to go to the King to ask for the decree to be annulled, it had to be accomplished by her personally — not by a Golem.

It is also interesting to note that the beam that Haman wanted to hang Mordechai from (but was himself eventually hung on) came from the Temple in Jerusalem. According to Jewish tradition the beam came from the Ark of Noah. This is further proof to the fact that no person who searches the world today can find the remnants of the ark. Jewish tradition says that it was dismantled.

The Mishna teaches us that a person who reads the story of Purim as an event of the past has not fulfilled their obligation of reading the Megillah.

The Megillah begins with the word 'Vayehi' - And it was. Our sages say that whenever this expression is used, it denotes difficult times and according

the Ramoh (Rabbi Moshe Isserles in his commentary Mechir Yayin) this scroll refers to the passage of a person's life from birth to when the body is returned to earth.

Then the Megillah continues that Achashverosh (which is not his actual name) ruled one hundred and twenty-seven lands. A simple question is, for what purpose does the Megillah add the amount of lands after it already says that he ruled from Hodu till Kush – the entire civilized world of that era.

The reason given (Rishon Letzion) is that this number reminds us of another place that this same exact number is used. Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years therefore this number evokes her memory. When Esther a great, great, grandchild becomes Queen, she connects with the merits of Sarah in addition to her own.

Next we see the advisor saying to Achashverosh (1:9) to kill Vashti and give the position of Queen to someone better than she.

As we know it says (Ecclesiastics 7:14) that, "The Almighty created one thing opposite the other," meaning that in general things in the realm of holiness have an opposite in the realm of the profane, and the Megillah is telling us that Esther is the good spiritual balance to the evil materialistic Vashti.

This is also (according to the Ramoh) a place where we see an idea of reincarnation, i.e. two souls of one level come into this world to be Queen, one part is destroyed and one part triumphs.

Furthermore, here we see an idea of second marriage. In the first marriage it is a soul partner (usually) while in the second marriage it is because of the deeds and actions of the person as it says here one who is better. She had to be better than the first one who was married because Vashti was of royal descent. Maybe this enabled Esther to conceal her nationality because the main concept was her worth as an individual beauty not her lineage.

Then the boy servants said to the King (2:2) "Let beautiful unmarried virgin girls be sought"; (The King decided that the young generation would serve him better) this would suggest that Esther had these qualities and in fact all

the girls that were brought to the palace were given different names except Esther which means a star (Venus) in Persian. Mordechai gave her this name, which has meaning in both Hebrew and Persian. In a deeper sense this passage is talking about the soul coming into a body and the choice of direction it takes.

Now we introduce Mordechai her cousin who raised her instead of her parents; her father died before she was born and her mother died in childbirth. Mordechai was the head of the Sanhedrin – Jewish High Court. He raised Haddasah (2:7), the word for raised used here is omen from the expression Emunah – faith/belief.

A mother usually spends more time with a child and their development; therefore, a mother has a greater feeling and sensitivity to enable her to bring it out in the child. Similarly, Mordechai had a deeper and greater sensitivity and he was thus able to develop a tremendously deep feeling of belief in Haddasah. There are comments that he could not find a wet nurse so he caused milk to come from his own breasts – the idea here is that the breasts represent a deeper/greater sense of emotion and feeling.

The name Haddasah means myrtle, which has a bitter taste but a pleasant fragrance – a real woman, bitter to Haman and pleasant to Mordechai. The pleasant fragrance represents good deeds (as we know from the four species used in the festival of Sukkot), which refers to her total self sacrifice for Judaism. Some say this was her color, like a myrtle, a deep olive complexion.

The expression in the Talmud is “Yerakrokes Hayso” that she was greenish. What exactly does this mean? On a simple level she was at home, never venturing outside. According to one opinion she was forty, another opinion eighty, and most opinions seventy-five, she must have been very pale.

In Hebrew colors it could be she could be a sea green or sky blue. The word also has a connotation of a double green – quite ugly. The next word, “She was” implies that she was ugly but now she is beautiful and the green is as the world is green and beautiful when surrounded with greenery. This would mean that on its own it is not so beautiful but in perspective of the world it is gorgeous.

Numerically Esther is Shoshana – a rose – royalty. When she was born, Mordechai had a dream and he knew that she would have to be concealed till the appropriate time. Thus he called her Esther meaning a double concealment like double green. Later she fell in front of his feet – a double falling and then she got up and stood up meaning that she rose out of both levels.

The Aramaic word for Myrtle (Haddasah) is Asta. With time and especially as she was kept home, people were unsure exactly who she was. They just imagined that she was a beautiful unmarried girl in the house. Mordechai was a main leader and probably had visitors coming to the house and in those times women had their own homes. The Jews who knew her were uncertain as to what she would be doing as she was an orphan, so marrying the King would be easy.

The girls were given to Haiguy – meaning the power of speech. This is one guard of a person and their form. They were each given Tamrukeihen – their spices and portions, etc. Each girl hurried to take whatever she could from the king's house, she did not want it, was forced to take what they gave and she also did not want to marry a non-Jew. She was also careful not to tell her nationality because she was commanded so by Mordechai. She was also a descendant from King Saul.

Esther was taken to the palace not the preparatory rooms because all girls went after the external (breath) while Esther went after the rational, the internal part of speech. Bais Hanoshim sheni refers to gilgul (reincarnation).

(2:13) And when it came the turn for each lass to come before the King, refers to when the soul leaves the body and comes in front of its maker. When the turn of Esther came (2:15) she requested nothing, she did not need the help of the angel Michael. This is because her level of self nullification, she only needed that which Haiguy the internal rational said.

Mayasher yoshit lo Hamelech is an acronym for Milah – circumcision.