

Purim – between exile and exilic customs and mentality

A guided discussion with high school students

A reading of sections from the Book of Esther:

What are the characteristics of exile in the passages you have read? (Their names, characterized according to religion and origins)

What can we learn about the Jews' situation under King Achashverosh? (Absolute dependence on the ruler and his caprice)

Discussion:

- Does what we have read characterize the Jews' situation in today's diaspora?
- How is it similar, and how is it different?

Reading from Min Hamish'ol (From the Path) / Brenner

- How does Brenner understand the word 'ghetto'? (Exile is not contingent upon physical location rather mainly a state of mind)

Discussion:

- Brenner thought that, even in the Land of Israel, we are still living in a state of exile. Do you agree with him?
- What should be done in order to avoid this condition?

The Book of Esther 2:5-9

Now there was in the citadel of Sushan a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Yair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish:

who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin[a] King of Judah.

Mordechai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordechai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Sushan and put under the care of Hegai. Esther too was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.

She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordechai had forbidden her to do so.



Esther 3:2-11

All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordechai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordechai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?"

Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordechai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

When Haman saw that Mordechai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.

Yet having learned who Mordechai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordechai.

Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordechai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Achashverosh.

In the twelfth year of King Achashverosh, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

Then Haman said to King Achashverosh, there is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury.

So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

Keep the money, the king said to Haman, and do with the people as you please.



Min Hamish'ol (From the Path) / Yosef Haim Brenner

Our outcry is one: We, the Jews, have no homeland. And without a country our lives are not worth living... The ghetto – this is a place where basic work is not performed and cannot be performed by us; hence, we are not connected to it, and we cannot be connected to it; hence, it cannot be our homeland, hence we cannot but feel like strangers in it.

And if there is yet hope of the curse of the ghetto ever being lifted, even just a little, and for just a small part of our nation, this will not be possible without a fundamental revolution in our lives, in our character, by creating Jewish work on land that belongs to us...

Explanation of the Book of Esther:

The Book of Esther is connected with Purim for two reasons:

1. In it are written the precepts connected with the holiday, from which the holiday as we know it today was created.
2. The Book itself is read on Purim, and the story it tells forms the basis for the values this holiday embodies.

The Book of Esther is unique from two important aspects:

1. It contains no explicit reference to the G-d of Israel (as opposed to all the other books of the Bible).
2. Its plot does not take place in the Land of Israel or on the way to it (as previously mentioned).