



# Thoughts on Purim

by Rabbi Bernie Fox



This week's Thoughts sponsored by Rabbi Bernie and Shirley Fox in honor of Dr. Jed Davis, NYHS Athletic Director & Lori Davis on the engagement of their daughter, Daphne Davis 2004 to Yishai Kanter

To sponsor the Thoughts on the Parasha in honor or in memory of a loved one and/or to donate to NYHS, please contact Melissa Rivkin at [mrivkin@nyhs.net](mailto:mrivkin@nyhs.net) or call 206.232.5272, extension 515 or visit us online at [www.nyhs.net](http://www.nyhs.net).



**NORTHWEST YESHIVA  
HIGH SCHOOL**

5017 90th Avenue SE  
Mercer Island, WA 98040  
206.232.5272  
[www.nyhs.net](http://www.nyhs.net)  
Graphics by Edison L. Leonen

## Thoughts on Purim: Part 1

*(Reprinted from 5772)*

### Lessons from Achashverosh

*And it was in the days of Achashverosh – the Achashverosh who ruled from Hodu to Kush – one hundred and twenty provinces. (Megilat Esther 1:1)*

#### 1. The messages of the Megilah story

The story related in Megilat Esther is constructed around the interplay between four personalities. Mordechai and Esther are the hero and heroin of the narrative. Haman is villain. Achashverosh is somewhat of an enigma. He is initially deftly manipulated by Haman, but later he emerges as the protector of the Jewish people. In other words, Achashverosh seems to be a passive figure in the narrative. Rather than initiating action, he is acted upon by others. Given this role, it would be expected for the Megilah to give him scant attention. Yet, the Megilah lavishes its attention upon Achashverosh and devotes the entire first chapter to developing a portrait of his personality.

According to the Talmud, the events described Megilah had a significant impact upon the attitudes of the Jewish people. Their experiences during the events, portrayed in the Megilah, provided compelling evidence of Hashem's ongoing providential relationship with the Jewish people. In addition, the events provided a moving lesson regarding human behavior and its consequences. They observed two powerful figures – Achashverosh and Haman – trapped by the failings of their own personalities. Their observations of these two personalities provided an object-lesson in the consequences of blind pursuit of honor and power or self-indulgent pleasure. Therefore, the Megilah does not only include a description of events unfolding according to the irresistible plan of providence. It also explores the behaviors, attitudes, and personalities of the main characters. This biographical component is designed to communicate the rewards of virtue and the consequences of evil and corruption.<sup>1</sup> The first character sketch in the Megilah is of the king – Achashverosh. In the following discussion, a few aspects of that sketch will be explored.

*In the third year of his reign, he made a party for all of his ministers and servants, the army of Paras and Madai, the nobility and the ministers of the provinces, before him. (Megilat Esther 1:3)*

#### 2. Achashverosh's celebration provides insight into his character

<sup>1</sup> Mesechet Megilah 19a.

---

---

Megilat Esther begins with a description of the celebration convened by Achashverosh in the third year of his ascent to the throne. This celebration ultimately led to a confrontation between Achashverosh and his queen, Vashti. Her defiance of the king resulted in her removal from the throne. This created the opportunity for Esther to replace Vashti as queen. In other words, Achashverosh's celebration played an important role in the events that are described in the Megilah. Nonetheless, the reason that the Megilah devotes so much attention to the celebration is not evident from the text. It would seem adequate for the Megilah to explain that Vashti was deposed as a consequence of a dispute with the king and that Achashverosh, in response to his loneliness, sought out a new consort. Why does the Megilah devote so much attention to Achashverosh's celebration? Apparently, the details of celebration and the events that occurred there provide a revealing portrait of Achashverosh's personality and his failings.

---

***There, he displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty, many days – one hundred and eighty days. When these days were completed, the king made a feast for all of the people that were present in Shushan the castle, both great and minor people, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. (Megilat Esther 1:4-5)***

---

### **3. The strange design of Achashverosh's celebration**

The Megilah explains that Achashverosh's celebration was composed of two separate feasts. The first was conducted for a period of 180 days. All of the dignitaries, ministers, and nobility were invited to this fete. The second feast was held for seven days. At this party, Achashverosh hosted the entire population of Shushan. Even the most common citizens were invited to attend. What was the purpose of Achashverosh's celebration and why did he create two events?

In discussing the first celebration, the Megilah explains that Achashverosh wished to display his wealth and glory. This objective becomes very meaningful when considered in the context of a comment by Rashi. Rashi explains that the celebration was occasioned by Achashverosh's consolidation of power and authority.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, Achashverosh felt it necessary to impress upon the leaders, ministers, nobility, and the bureaucracy of his extended kingdom that he was now firmly in control and that he was the absolute monarch of the realm.

This explains Achashverosh's motives for convening the first feast. Why did he follow this 180-day fete with a second feast on behalf of the citizens of Shushan?

---

***And they gave them drink in vessels of gold – vessels of diverse types – and the royal wine was abundant, according to the bounty of the king. The drinking was according to the instruction; no one was compelled. For so the king had directed to all the administrators of his household, that they should do according to every man's desire. (Megilat Esther 1:7-8)***

---

### **4. Achashverosh's dual objectives and their relationship to one another**

In describing the second party, the Megilah explains that the participants were served wine in vessels of gold of diverse styles. An unlimited quantity of drink was made available to the guests. Then, the Megilah adds that Achashverosh instructed his household servants to carefully respect the preferences of his guests. Every guest was to be given as much wine as he wished. No one was to be denied the opportunity to fully indulge his appetite for drink and no one was to be forced to drink more than he wished. Rashi explains the importance of this instruction and its intention. At many parties, guests are required to drink cup after cup of wine as a courtesy to the host.<sup>3</sup> Achashverosh specifically instructed his staff to not create such an expectation. Achashverosh wanted his guests to truly enjoy themselves. He did not want their enjoyment to be marred by the necessities of protocol or social custom. Each guest was free to conduct himself – in regard to drink – as he pleased, free from the imposition of protocol or custom.

This suggests that Achashverosh had a second objective in creating his celebration. He wished to create a party in which the participants would be encouraged to fully indulge their desires free of social protocol or restrictive custom. This objective was achieved in the second feast. This party was a hedonistic experience.

---

<sup>2</sup> Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), *Commentary on Megilat Esther 1:2*.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), *Commentary on Megilat Esther 1:8*.

---

---

In short, each of the two component feasts of the celebration had its own purpose. The first fete was designed to impress upon the political and social leadership of the kingdom that Achashverosh was their supreme and absolute ruler. The second component focused on pure pleasure, unfettered by social protocol. However, the identification of the objectives of each component feast does not completely explain Achashverosh's plan. Why could the two objectives not be combined in a single feast? Why did each feast with its unique objective also have its unique guest list?

In order to understand the odd structure of Achashverosh's celebration, it is necessary to know more about his background. The Sages explain that Achashverosh was not the scion of noble lineage. He was a commoner who rose to power and deposed the royal family. This insight adds a dimension to the purpose of the first party. For 180 days Achashverosh hosted the leadership, royalty, and bureaucracy of his vast kingdom. He asserted his authority. The common people of Shushan were not included among the invited guests to this affair. Achashverosh did not need to impress the commoners. He did not need to assert his power over or demonstrate his authority to the plebeian class of Shushan. However, after the first feast ended, he immediately convened a party for the common people of Shushan. What does this reveal about Achashverosh?

Apparently, the second party was Achashverosh's response to the first affair. For 180 days he had been required to appear before and to impress the notables and nobility of his kingdom. Furthermore, his objective was to impress upon his guests his authority and grandeur. In order to accomplish his objective, he was required to conduct himself with dignity and restraint. He succeeded and he completed the 180-day celebration without mishap. However, the lengthy, dignified, and restrained affair was an ordeal for Achashverosh. Therefore, he immediately convened a second celebration. The second party was designed to correct the defect of the first party and provide Achashverosh with a release that he needed desperately and felt he had earned. The second party paid no attention to protocol or social convention. Demonstrations of authority were replaced by abandonment to pleasure. This was not a feast for royalty and dignitaries. Achashverosh realized the elite of society would scoff at such an undignified adventure in hedonism. Instead, Achashverosh chose as his companions the common people – the members of the plebeian class who were his brothers. For Achashverosh, this second feast was the true party and the reward for his previous ordeal. However, at this second feast, Achashverosh faltered and thereby, he placed his reign in jeopardy.

---

*On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Bizta, Harbona, Bigta, Abagta, Zetar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that ministered before the king Ahasuerus to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was fair in appearance. (Megilat Esther 1:10-11)*

---

##### **5. Achashverosh's motives for precipitating a confrontation with Vashti**

On the final day of the second feast, Achashverosh precipitated a fateful confrontation with his queen, Vashti. After 186 days of celebration, Achashverosh became mindlessly drunk. In his intoxicated state, he commanded that Vashti appear before his guests so that he might display her astounding beauty. How was Achashverosh able to contain his appetites and remain sober until this point and why did he now permit himself to become intoxicated? Furthermore, why did his loss of control express itself in his precipitation of a confrontation with his queen? Even drunk, Achashverosh must have realized that he was inviting a confrontation with Vashti!

Our Sages provide an additional bit of information that is essential to understanding the confrontation that unfolded between Achashverosh and Vashti. They explain that Achashverosh and Vashti came to the throne from very different backgrounds. In contrast to Achashverosh's humble origins, Vashti boasted royal lineage. Achashverosh was a commoner and usurper who seized the throne and took Vashti as his queen.<sup>4</sup> It is very likely that his marriage to Vashti was designed to consolidate and legitimize his position as sovereign.

In this context, Achashverosh's treatment of Vashti provides another insight into his personality. His treatment of Vashti expresses a need to demean her and to deprive her of dignity. This suggests that Achashverosh felt intimidated by Vashti's royal lineage and somewhat inadequate in comparison to his queen. In other words, despite his power and authority, Achashverosh remained insecure. He could not dispel his own sense, that ultimately, he was a commoner who had usurped the throne from the royal family.

---

<sup>4</sup> Mesechet Megilah 12b and 11a.

---

---

Vashti evoked a deep sense of inadequacy. Under normal circumstances, Achashverosh was in control of his feelings and did not give public expression to his attitude toward Vashti. Now, in his drunken state, his resentments and his sense of inferiority overpowered his good sense and he engineered a showdown with his royal queen.

It is not surprising that only now – well into his second feast – did Achashverosh become drunk and lose his self-control. As explained, Achashverosh was intimidated by Vashti's noble heritage. If this was Vashti's affect upon him, one can imagine the strain he experienced during the first 180-day feast. For 180 days, Achashverosh was surrounded by nobility and notables. He was required to impress his guests and demonstrate authority. However, these very people, whom he labored to impress, reminded him of his own plebeian origins and evoked a deep sense of inferiority. Now, at his second feast, his ego was buoyed by the company of the common people of Shushan – the people among whom he felt secure and confident. In this environment, he felt comfortable fully indulging his hedonistic desires. He also became engrossed in his resentment of those who made him feel inferior and unworthy. To Achashverosh, no person represented the class of privilege more than his own queen – Vashti. Eventually, his state of mind and judgment were compromised by his drunkenness. His anger and resentment gained control over him and he precipitated the confrontation with Vashti.

---

*And the queen Vashti refused to come at the instructions of the king through the chamberlains. And the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him. (Megilat Esther 1:12)*

---

#### **6. Vashti's refusal and Achashverosh's reaction**

Achashverosh's reaction of Vashti's refusal to attend to his wishes was immediate and extreme. He was overcome with anger. The remarkable intensity of Achashverosh's reaction can be appreciated in the context of another comment of our Sages. They explain that in response to Achashverosh's ill-mannered invitation, Vashti delivered a sharp rebuke. She reminded Achashverosh of his humble origins. She attributed his drunkenness and boorish behavior to these origins and contrasted Achashverosh to her own regal father who never demeaned himself publicly.<sup>5</sup> In other words, rather than achieving his goal of humbling Vashti, Achashverosh was reminded by her of his own inadequacy. The very insecurities that motivated his confrontation with Vashti were intensified and transformed into indignant anger.

In summary, the first chapter of Megilat Esther provides two important insights into Achashverosh's personality. First, despite his ascent to the throne, in his heart he remained a member of the plebeian class. He was capable of acting with restraint and dignity – for a period of time. However, he was drawn toward the hedonistic lifestyle and could not resist its allure. Second, Achashverosh was a powerful king. Yet, he was plagued by a sense of inferiority and inadequacy. He had risen to the highest rank within society. Yet, he viewed himself as a usurper and interloper. These character traits fatefully combined and led Achashverosh into a confrontation with Vashti and ultimately caused him to depose and kill his queen.

## **Thoughts on Purim: Part 2**

### **Purim 5773**

### **It's not Easy being Haman**

---

*And when Haman saw that Mordechai bowed not down, nor prostrated himself before him, then Haman was full of wrath. But it seemed contemptible in his eyes to lay hands on Mordechai alone; for they had made known to him the people of Mordechai. And Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Achashverosh, even the people of Mordechai. (Megilat Esther 3:5-6)*

---

<sup>5</sup> Mesechet Megilah 12b.

---

---

## 1. The confrontation between Haman and Mordechai

Megilat Esther focuses on two aspects of Haman's character. It explains the strategy he employed in order to manipulate Achashverosh. The Megilah also explores the nature of Haman's wickedness. It delves into the source of his pathological fixation upon Mordechai and the Jewish people. However, the Megilah's treatment of this issue is not manifestly expressed in its passages. Instead, careful consideration of two incidents is required for the Megilah's message to emerge.

Haman seems to acquire his hatred for the Jewish people soon after his appointment as Achashverosh's vizier. The Megilah explains that with this appointment came a directive that all members of the court and subjects of the king pay homage to Haman by kneeling and prostrating themselves before him. This directive was obeyed by the king's servants and subjects. Mordechai, alone, refused to obey the royal directive and pay homage to the king's vizier.

Apparently, Mordechai's behavior did not immediately disturb Haman. It seems that initially he was not even aware of Mordechai's refusal to follow the king's edict. However, among those who observed Mordechai's behavior, his refusal to kneel and prostrate himself before Haman was sensational. These observers understood from Mordechai that his actions expressed his convictions as a Jew. They made Haman aware of Mordechai's behavior. They wanted to precipitate a conflict between Haman and Mordechai and see who would triumph. The Megilah explains that at this point Haman first took notice of Mordechai and discovered that the report brought to him was accurate. Indeed, Mordechai would not kneel or prostrate himself before him.

Haman was consumed with anger. His anger was provoked by Mordechai but it extended to all Jews. Haman decided that he would seek the destruction of all Jews in the kingdom.

Two aspects of Haman's reaction to Mordechai require further consideration. First, the Megilah explains that when Haman became aware of Mordechai's resistance he was filled with anger. Haman enjoyed virtually universal recognition. One single individual – Mordechai – refused to efface himself. Mordechai's lonely protest was so insignificant that Haman did not even notice it until instigators brought it to his attention. Why was Haman so infuriated by Mordechai's actions? Second, the Megilah describes Mordechai as an outlier even among Jews. Apparently, other Jews obeyed the king's directive. Why did Haman decide to destroy all of the Jews because of Mordechai's behavior?

---

*And Haman recounted unto them the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and everything as to how the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover: Yea, Esther the queen did let any man come in with the king to the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow also am I invited by her together with the king. Yet, all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. (Megilat Esther 5:11-13)*

---

## 2. Mordechai's profound effect on Haman

In order to answer these questions, another incident should be considered. As the story of the Megilah progresses, Haman persuades Achashverosh to allow him to issue a decree promoting the annihilation of the kingdom's Jews. Mordechai appeals to Esther the queen to intercede with Achashverosh and ask that he revoke the decree. Esther decides against directly appealing to Achashverosh. Instead, she invites the king and Haman to a party she has prepared exclusively for them. This party does not provide Esther with an opportunity to appeal to Achashverosh. Esther invites Haman and Achashverosh to second exclusive party the following night.

Upon leaving the queen's residence, Haman encounters Mordechai. Again, Haman's nemesis refuses to pay him homage. Haman is enraged. He returns to his home and gathers his closest confidants and his wife. He delivers an address. He begins by describing his fame and wealth. He boasts of his many sons. He proudly notes that even the queen acknowledges his singular position in the kingdom. She has twice included him alone in intimate parties she has made for the king. Then, Haman makes an amazing statement. He declares that all his accomplishments, his wealth, and his glory are rendered meaningless by Mordechai's defiance.



---

---

How can this be explained? Why did Mordechai's behavior have such a powerful effect on Haman? How is it possible that all of Haman's accomplishments were rendered meaningless by the defiance of this one lonely Jew?

The answer to all of these questions is provided by a comment of our Sages. The Sages are discussing Mordechai's reason for not obeying the king's directive to pay homage to Haman. They explain that Mordechai refused to obey the directive because Haman had made himself into a deity.<sup>6</sup>

The actual narrative of the Megillah does not seem to support the conclusion that Haman ascribed supernatural powers or omnipotence to himself. The Sages are not necessarily suggesting that the Megillah omitted this important element of the narrative. Instead, perhaps the Sages are suggesting that Haman was enamored with his perception of his own greatness. He believed himself to be singular, powerful, and brilliant. He perceived himself as the master of fate and destiny and as the potentate who either ruled or manipulated all others. He deserved the acknowledgement of lesser human beings and their adulation.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this outlook is an absurd presumption for any human being. We are all frail creatures. We cannot control nature or protect ourselves from its extremes. A single sick cell within our complex bodies can multiply unchecked and bring us to an untimely end. Our power and our influence over our destiny are illusionary. At times we may entertain an illusion of greatness, but a sudden change in our finances, the illness of a friend or family member brings reality home to us.

Because the discordance between reality and Haman's fantasy was so extreme he was required to resort to extreme measures to maintain his illusion. His energy was devoted to supporting his fantasy and suppressing any evidence that contradicted his illusion of greatness. We can imagine Haman's thinking. If others experienced sudden financial ruin, it was because they were not as wise as he. If others were confronted by children or wives who rebelled against their authority, it was because they did not wield their authority as effectively as he. If others were struck by illness or even death, it was because they lacked his physical vigor.

Now, Haman's reaction to Mordechai has a context and is understandable. Mordechai was a lone, humble, exiled Jew. He was not a notable significant personage. In fact, before it was brought to his attention, Haman had no reason to monitor or even notice Mordechai's behavior. However, once brought to his attention, Mordechai's insignificance made his resistance an even greater affront and threat to Haman. That a simple, powerless, single, exiled Jew could resist his power and authority, was a complete contradiction to Haman's illusion of greatness. It was impossible for Haman to reconcile Mordechai's brave resistance with his all-consuming fantasy of power and grandeur.

The Megillah beautifully captures all this in its description of Haman's conversation with his wife and closest confidants. He enumerates his accomplishments. He presents the impressive evidence of his greatness. Then, he declares that all of this is rendered meaningless and worthless by Mordechai's resistance. How did Mordechai acquire such powerful sway over Haman? Ironically, Mordechai's humble status and his insignificance gave him this power. His resistance undermined all of Haman's efforts to create and maintain his fantasy of human greatness. If this insignificant Jew could not be controlled and subdued, Haman's claims to greatness would be proven to be nothing more than an illusionary pretense.

However, Haman recognized that Mordechai was the product of a worldview. Although the other Jews of Shushan may not have shared Mordechai's bravery, Haman realized that the Torah was the source of Mordechai's worldview and resistance. According to this worldview, no human being is all-powerful. The success of every human endeavor depends on the benevolence of a Creator who is truly omnipotent. Man is actually a weak and fragile creature dependent upon the kindness bestowed upon him by his true heavenly master. This day Mordechai stood alone in his courageous disobedience. However, as long as the people of the Torah existed, new "Mordechais" would emerge. Haman knew that the threat to his fantasy was not only Mordechai. The true danger was presented by the Torah and those who studied and adhered to its lessons. This meant that the Jewish people must be destroyed with Mordechai.

---

<sup>6</sup> Midrash Rabba, Esther 7:8.

<sup>7</sup> See Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *Days of Deliverance*, pp. 35-37.

---

---

***And Haman said unto King Achashverosh: There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people; neither do they keep the king's laws. Therefore, it profits not the king to suffer them. (Megilat Esther 3:8)***

---

### **3. Haman's manipulation of Achashverosh**

Haman's fantasy of greatness was not contradicted by his subservience to the king. Haman realized that the king had ultimate authority. However, he was confident in his ability to manipulate Achashverosh to achieve his own ends. His success in convincing Achashverosh to kill his own loyal subjects confirmed to Haman that he was the true power in the kingdom. How was Haman able to so effectively control his king? What was his strategy?

The Megilah provides an indication of his methods in its introduction of Haman. It explains that Haman's appointment as vizier followed the events described in the prior chapter. The final episode in the prior chapter was the plot by two of the king's entourage to assassinate him. The Megilah explains that their plot was uncovered by Mordechai, reported to the king, and they were executed. Apparently, this episode led to the appointment of Haman.

The opening passages of the Megilah describe two elaborate celebrations that Achashverosh convened to commemorate his consolidation of control over his kingdom. Our Sages explain that Achashverosh did not inherit his throne. He seized it.<sup>8</sup> The plot against him by members of his own entourage suggested some members of the court continued to oppose him. Haman's appointment followed Achashverosh's narrow escape from assassination. This indicates that Achashverosh's appointment of Haman was at least partially motivated by concern over his personal security and the stability of his control over his kingdom.

Haman recognized Achashverosh's preoccupation with his personal security and his fear that rebellion might erupt at any moment. He used these fears to manipulate his king. He described the Jews as an ethnically discrete people that held itself apart from the rest of the population. He also noted that the Jews lived throughout the kingdom. Haman understood that Achashverosh would perceive the Jews – described in this way – as a perfect fifth column. Their separateness would suggest to a paranoid Achashverosh that their loyalty should not be assumed. Their dispersion throughout the kingdom would suggest to him that they were potentially the basis for a widespread network of resistance to his authority. Achashverosh would conclude that the Jews posed an ongoing threat to his security. He would eagerly hand them over to Haman for extermination.<sup>9</sup>

In short, Haman was a perceptive interpreter of Achashverosh's needs, desires, and fears. He understood how to utilize his insight into Achashverosh to pursue his own personal agenda. He combined this understanding with a capacity to package his own objectives in a form that would appeal to his king's fears and insecurities. Perhaps, these characteristics of Haman are the basis of the contention of the Sages that Haman and Memuchan were a single character.<sup>10</sup>

---

***And Memuchan answered before the king and the princes: Vashti the queen has not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the peoples, who are in all the provinces of the king Achashverosh. For this deed of the queen will come abroad unto all women, to make their husbands contemptible in their eyes, when it will be said: The king Achashverosh commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.***

***And this day will the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the deed of the queen say the like unto all the king's princes. So will there arise enough contempt and wrath. (Megilat Esther 1:16-18)***

---

### **4. Memuchan is Haman**

Memuchan appears earlier in the Megilah than Haman. In this earlier episode, Queen Vashti was summoned by a drunken Achashverosh to display herself before the commoners of Shushan. Our Sages explain that Vashti was the scion of the royal family

---

<sup>8</sup> Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), *Commentary on Megilat Esther* 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *Days of Deliverance*, pp. 81-85.

<sup>10</sup> Mesechet Megilah 12b.

and refused to be made into a spectacle for the entertainment of the boorish king and his commoner companions. Achashverosh understood Vashti's response as a rebuke, a reminder of his humble origins, and as an expression of the queen's pretensions of superiority. He responded with intense anger.<sup>11</sup> Yet, he saw no means by which he could punish the queen. Apparently, he did not feel he could enter into a confrontation with a member of the royal family.

Memuchan provided Achashverosh with a solution. He suggested that Achashverosh recast his conflict with Vashti. He should portray Vashti as a social radical promoting a dangerous attack on conventional family values – as a subversive social revolutionary determined to undermine the authority of husbands in their own homes. Thus recast, the conflict could be addressed. The king would play the role of champion of traditional values. He would be free to act against Vashti and punish her as he pleased.

Memuchan understood his master's true desires. He recognized that Achashverosh was not interested in his counselors' advice regarding how to best respond to Vashti's challenge to his authority. Achashverosh knew how he wanted to respond. He wished to severely punish his queen. Memuchan perceived that Achashverosh was seeking a means by which to exact his vengeance. Also, Memuchan demonstrated a remarkable capacity to package Achashverosh's destruction of Vashti as a moral imperative. He transformed an act of personal vengeance into a courageous defense of fundamental social values. Both of these traits are identical to the talents demonstrated by Haman. Perhaps, these similarities suggested to the Sages that Haman and Memuchan were a single character.

David never succeeded in communicating a message of inclusion or universality. However, this was a direct result of his greatness as a warrior and as the protector of the Jewish people. To criticize David for his shortcomings, when compared to Shlomo, is to fail to recognize and appreciate his greatness.

<sup>11</sup> Mesechet Megilah 12b.

