That Shimshai was erasing – קְפַר אָמַר: כְּפַר אָמַר that Shimshai, the king’s scribe who hated the Jews (see Ezra 4:17), was erasing the description of Mordecai’s saving the king, and the angel Gabriel was writing it again. Therefore, it was indeed being written in the present. Rav Asi said: Rabbi Sheila, a man of the village of Timarta, taught: If something written down below in this world that is for the benefit of the Jewish people cannot be erased, is it not all the more so the case that something written up above in Heaven cannot be erased?

The sleep of the king was disturbed – רַבִּי הַפְּתָחִים relates that he was Haman’s son. The Midrash understands that he was Haman’s son. The Midrash understands that one, Blessed be He, which would indicate that God’s so-called slumber was disturbed due to the decree against the Jewish people. Others explain that the statement: The sleep of the higher ones was disturbed and the sleep of the lower ones was disturbed, indicates that the sleep of both Mordecai, who is known as the higher one, and Haman, who is known as the lower one, were disturbed on that night, each one for a different reason (Iyyun Yaakov).

And and the Rabbis say: Those that begged at other people’s doors numbered seventy, as it is written: “Those that were full, have hired themselves out for bread” (1 Samuel 2:5). Do not read it as: “Those that were full” [seve’im]; rather, read it as seventy [shivim], indicating that there were seventy who “hired themselves out for bread.”

The verse states: “On that night the sleep of the king was disturbed” (Esther 6:1). Rabbi Tanhum said: The verse alludes to another king who could not sleep; the sleep of the King of the universe, the Holy One, Blessed be He, was disturbed. And the Sages say: The sleep of the higher ones, the angels, was disturbed, and the sleep of the lower ones, the Jewish people, was disturbed. Rava said: This should be understood literally: The sleep of King Ahasuerus was disturbed.

The verse states: “And they were read before the king” (Esther 6:1). The Gemara explains that this passive form: “And they were read,” teaches that they were read miraculously by themselves. It further says: “And it was found written [katuv]” (Esther 6:2). The Gemara asks: Why does the Megilla use the word katuv, which indicates that it was newly written? It should have said: A writing [ketuv] was found, which would indicate that it had been written in the past. The Gemara explains: This teaches numerical value [gamatriyya] – אָמַר: כְּפַר אָמַר Many efforts have been made to find the precise source for this word. It is probably derived from the Greek γεωμετρία, geometric, which was understood in the general sense as referring to calculations, and is used in that sense in rabbinic literature. From this it was applied more specifically to calculating the numerical value of the letters of the alphabet.

NOTES

The sleep of the king was disturbed – רַבִּי הַפְּתָחִים relates that he was Haman’s son. The Midrash understands that one, Blessed be He, which would indicate that God’s so-called slumber was disturbed due to the decree against the Jewish people. Others explain that the statement: The sleep of the higher ones was disturbed and the sleep of the lower ones was disturbed, indicates that the sleep of both Mordecai, who is known as the higher one, and Haman, who is known as the lower one, were disturbed on that night, each one for a different reason (Iyyun Yaakov).
The idea that they were not fond of Mordecai is indicated in the verse because they did not answer: Nothing of value and greatness was done with him, but rather: “Nothing has been done for him.” Essentially they were saying that it is fitting to do something for him, but not necessarily something of value and greatness (Maharsha). Some emphasize that the fact that they refer to Mordecai in that verse as “him” rather than mentioning his name indicates their lack of love for him (Kol Yehuda).

That he had prepared for himself – קְמִיצָה. This exposition is derived primarily through the presence of the apparently superfluous term “for him,” which is understood to refer to Haman himself, as in the end it was he who was hanged on the tree that he prepared for Mordecai (see Rash). Similarly, the midrashim and the Targum explain that from the moment Haman prepared the tree, it was already destined from Heaven for Haman himself, as in the end it was he who was hanged on that tree.

He was demonstrating to them the halakhot of the handful – קְמִיצָה. The Midrash explains that as that day was the sixteenth of Nisan, on which the omer is offered, they were discussing the halakhot of the handful of the omer offering, which were pertinent to that day.

Handful – קְמִיצָה: This refers to the scooping out of a handful of flour from the meal-offering in order to burn it on the altar. Most meal-offerings require a handful (see, e.g., Leviticus 2:1). This rite, which paralleled the slaughtering of an animal offering, was performed only by a priest. According to many authorities, the priest would scoop out the flour with the three middle fingers of his right hand, using his thumb and little finger to remove any surplus flour. He would then place the flour in a sacred vessel used in the Temple service in order to consecrate it. Since the priest had to scoop out an exact handful of flour, no more and no less, the scooping of the handful was one of the more difficult rites in the Temple.

The verse states that Ahasuerus was told with regard to Mordecai: “Nothing has been done for him” (Esther 6:3). Rava said: It is not because they love Mordecai that the king’s servants said this, but rather because they hate Haman.

The verse states: “Now Haman had come into the outer court of the king’s house, to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him” (Esther 6:4). A Sage taught in a baraita: ‘This should be understood to mean: On the gallows that he had prepared for himself.”

The verse relates that Ahasuerus ordered Haman to fulfill his idea of the proper way to honor one who the king desires to glorify by parading him around on the king’s horse while wearing the royal garments: “And do so to Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king’s gate, let nothing fail of all that you have spoken” (Esther 6:10). The Gemara explains that when Ahasuerus said to Haman: “And do so to Mordecai,” Haman said to him in an attempt to evade the order: Who is Mordecai? Ahasuerus said to him: “The Jew.” Haman then said to him: There are several men named Mordecai among the Jews. Ahasuerus then said to him: I refer to the one “who sits at the king’s gate.”

Haman said to him: Why award him such a great honor? It would certainly be enough for him to receive one village [diskarta] as an estate, or one river for the levy of taxes. Ahasuerus said to him: This too you must give him. “Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken,” i.e., provide him with all that you proposed and spoke about in addition to what I had said.

The Gemara describes what occurred as Haman went to follow the king’s orders, as the verse states: “Then Haman took the apparel and the horse” (Esther 6:11). When he went, he found Mordecai as the Sages were sitting before him, and he was demonstrating to them the halakhot of the handful, i.e., the scooping out of a handful of flour from the meal-offering in order to burn it on the altar. Once Mordecai saw him coming toward him with his horse’s reins held in his hands, he became frightened, and he said to the Sages: This evil man has come to kill me. Go away from him so that you should not get burnt from his coals, i.e., that you should not suffer harm as well. At that moment Mordecai wrapped himself in his prayer shawl and stood up to pray. Haman came over to where they were and sat down before them and waited until Mordecai finished his prayer.
In the interim, as he waited, Haman said to the other Sages:

With what were you occupied? They said to him: When the Temple is standing, one who pledges a meal-offering would bring a handful of fine flour and achieve atonement with it. He said to them: Your handful of fine flour has come and cast aside my ten thousand pieces of silver, which I had pledged toward the destruction of the Jewish people. When Mordecai finished praying, he said to Haman: Wicked man, when a slave buys property, to whom belongs the slave and to whom belongs the property? As I once bought you as a slave, what silver can be yours?

In the meantime, Esther sent messengers and closed all the bathhouses and all the shops of the craftsmen, including the bloodletters and barbers. When Haman saw that there was nobody else to do the work, he himself took Mordecai into the bathhouse and washed him, and then he went and brought scissors [גזרת] from his house and trimmed his hair. While he was trimming his hair he injured himself and sighed. Mordecai said to him: Why do you sigh? Haman said to him: The man whom the king had once regarded above all his other ministers is now made a bathhouse attendant [בַּלָּן] and a barber. Mordecai said to him: Wicked man, were you not once the barber of the village of Kartzum? If so, why do you sigh? You have merely returned to the occupation of your youth. I was taught in a baraita: Haman was the barber of the village of Kartzum for twenty-two years.

After Haman trimmed his hair, Haman dressed Mordecai in the royal garments. Haman then said to him: Mount the horse and ride. Mordecai said to him: I am unable, as my strength has waned from the days of fasting that I observed. Haman then stooped down before him and Mordecai ascended on him. As he was ascending the horse, Mordecai gave Haman a kick. Haman said to him: Is it not written for you: “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls” (Proverbs 24:17)? Mordecai said to him: This statement applies only to Jews, but with regard to you it is written: “And you shall tread upon their high places” (Deuteronomy 32:29).

The verse states: “And he proclaimed before him: Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor” (Esther 6:1). As Haman was taking Mordecai along the street of Haman’s house, Haman’s daughter was standing on the roof and saw the spectacle. She thought to herself that the one who is riding on the horse must be her father, and the one walking before him must be Mordecai. She then took a chamber pot full of feces and cast its contents onto the head of her father, whom she mistakenly took as Mordecai. When Haman raised his eyes in disgust afterward, and looked up at his daughter, she saw that he was her father. In her distress, she fell from the roof to the ground and died.

And this is as it is written: “And Mordecai returned to the king’s gate” (Esther 6:12). Rav Sheshet said: This means that he returned to his sackcloth and his fasting over the troubles of the Jewish people. Simultaneously, “but Haman hastened to his house, mourning, and having his head covered” (Esther 6:12). “Mourning”, over the death of his daughter. “And having his head covered”, due to what had happened to him, as his head was full of filth.
The fact that there are wise men among the nations of the world is not a new idea and is not the novelty in the verse; see, however, the Hator Sofer. Rather, the Gemara is explaining that even though they were previously called “his friends,” their uttering even one wise statement made them worthy of being called “his wise men” (flashash). They were wise in that they recognized that there are some Jews before whom if Haman falls even once, it is a sign that he will never again be able to prevail over them (Rabbi Yosef Pinto). Others explain that they were wise in that they were indicating to Haman that he should flee to save his life. However, before he was able to do this he was taken to the king (Iyun Yaakov).

This adversity is not concerned (eino sheveh) – why does the king’s chamberlains come? The word sheveh is explained here to mean concerned with, or cares about. The same root is used in the verse “which put forth fruit freely (yeshoveh)” (Hosea 10:1).

She was pointing toward Ahasuerus – kohein gedol. Most of the commentaries explain that she wanted to blame Ahasuerus for his involvement with the decree. However, the Rishon Le’Tzion explains that out of emotional excitement she mistakenly pointed her finger at Ahasuerus.

Here is what Mordecai’s friends actually said: “And said to Esther the queen: ‘Thou and thy servants, and all the Jews, have slain and committed mischief to a great multitude of thy people; and what is thine issue?’” (Esther 7:2).

The following verse states: “And Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and to all his friends everything that had befallen him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him: If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, be of the seed of the Jews, then you will not prevail over him, but you shall fall before him” (Esther 6:13). The Gemara comments: At the beginning of the verse it calls them “his friends,” and in the continuation of the verse it calls them “his wise men.” Rabbi Yohanan said: Whoever says something wise, even if he is from the nations of the world, is called a wise man.

The Gemara explains that their wise remark, which earned them their distinction, is contained in their advice: “If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews [Yehudim], then you will not prevail over him” (Esther 6:13). The word Yehudim can also refer to people from the tribe of Judah. Haman’s wise men thereby said to him: If he descends from the other tribes, you can still prevail over him, but if he descends from the tribe of either Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, or Manasseh, you cannot prevail over him. With regard to Judah, the proof of this is as it is written: “Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies” (Genesis 49:8), indicating that Judah will emerge victorious over his enemies. And the proof that Haman cannot prevail over the others that were mentioned is as it is written with regard to them: “Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your might” (Psalms 80:3).

The wise men continued: “But you shall fall [nafol tipplol] before him” (Esther 6:13). Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai interpreted a verse homiletically: Why are these two fallings, nafol and tipplol, mentioned here? The wise men said to Haman: This Jewish nation is compared in the Bible to the dust of the earth and it is also compared to the stars in heaven. This teaches you that when they descend, they descend to the dust, and when they rise, they rise to the stars. Accordingly, when Mordecai is on the rise, you will be utterly incapable of prevailing over him.

The next verse states: “The king’s chamberlains came, and they hastened [suyavhila] to bring Haman’ (Esther 6:14). This teaches that they brought him in disarray [behala], not even giving him a chance to wash himself from the filth.

During the banquet Esther said to Ahasuerus: “For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated. But if we had been sold merely for bondmen and bondwomen, I would have held my tongue, since the affliction [zar] would not have been worth [eino shoeh] the damage to the king” (Esther 7:4). The Gemara explains that she said to him: This adversary [zar] is not concerned [eino shoeh] about the damage that he is constantly causing to the king. First he was jealous of Vashti and killed her, as it has been explained that Memucan, who suggesting killing Vashti, was Haman; now he is jealous of me and desires to kill me.

The verse states: “Then said the king Ahasuerus and said to Esther the queen” (Esther 7:5). The Gemara asks: Why do I need it to say “said” and again “said”? Rabbi Abba Shaul said: At first he spoke to her through the translator, who would interpret on his behalf, because he thought that she was a common woman of lowly ancestry. Once she told him that she came from the house of Saul, immediately it says: “And said to Esther the queen.” Ahasuerus himself spoke to her, as if she had royal lineage, she was a woman befitting his status.

The next verse states: “And Esther said: An adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman” (Esther 7:6). Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that she was in fact pointing toward Ahasuerus, indicating that in fact he was an adversary and enemy, and an angel came and pushed her hand toward Haman.
The verse states: “And the king arose from the banquet of wine in his wrath and went into the palace garden” (Esther 7:7), and the next verse states: “Then the king returned out of the palace garden to the place of the wine drinking” (Esther 7:8). The Gemara asks: Why does it say “was falling” [nofel] in the present tense, implying that he was currently falling? It should have said “fell” [nahal] in the past tense. Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that an angel came and pushed him down on it, and every time he would try to stand up, the angel would push him down again. Ahasuerus said: Woe unto me in the house and woe unto me outside, as the verse continues: “Then the king said: Will he even force the queen before me in the house?” (Esther 7:8).

And when he entered his house he saw that “Haman was falling upon the bed” (Esther 7:8). The Gemara asks: Why does it say “was falling” [nofel] in the present tense, implying that he was currently falling? It should have said “fell” [nahal] in the past tense. Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that an angel came and pushed him down on it, and every time he would try to stand up, the angel would push him down again. Ahasuerus said: Woe unto me in the house and woe unto me outside, as the verse continues: “Then the king said: Will he even force the queen before me in the house?” (Esther 7:8).

Before continuing its midrashic interpretation of the rest of the book of Esther, the Gemara expounds a verse concerning Joseph that relates to the Megilla: “To all of them he gave each man changes of clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of clothing” (Genesis 45:22). The Gemara asks: Is it possible that in the very thing from which that righteous man Joseph had suffered, as his father’s show of favoritism toward him aroused the enmity of his brothers, he himself should stumble by showing favoritism to Benjamin? As Rava bar Mehaseya said that Rav Hama bar Gurya said that Rav said: Due to the weight of two selas of fine wool that Jacob gave to Joseph, which he added to what he gave Joseph beyond what he gave the rest of his brothers, as he made him his special coat, the story progressed and our forefathers went down to Egypt. How then could Joseph have displayed similar favoritism toward Benjamin? Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said: He was not showing favoritism. Rather, he intimated to him that a descendant was destined to issue from him who would go out from the presence of the king wearing five royal garments, as it is stated: “And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of sky blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a wrap of fine linen and purple” (Esther 8:15).
Light, this is the Torah in each and every heart. One might wonder what the connection is between the salvation of Purim and the light associated with the happiness of Yom Ha’atzma’ut, Shabbat, and circumcision. Some commentaries explain, based on the drash in tractate Shabbat (89a), that during the Purim of Mordecai, the Jewish people reaccepted the Torah upon themselves. Therefore, the verse refers to the Torah itself and to several mitzvot with which the Jewish people renewed their connection in the aftermath of the miracle (Zikhron Basiyer). Others write, based on the Tanug, including Rashi, who built his explanation on it, that these mitzvot are singled out because Haman had outlawed mitzvot with which the Jewish people renewed their observance and that when the decree was annulled the Jews once again fulfilled these mitzvot. See the later authorities, who question Rashi’s source. Furthermore, the mention of the mitzvot is significant, as the verse indicates that “many from the peoples of the land became Jews” (Esther 8:17), and thereby there was widespread mitzva observance, both new and renewed (Maharsha). Additionally, others understand that since all of the mitzvot mentioned distinguish the Jews from others, during the period of the decree against the Jewish people the Jews observed these mitzvot only in private, so as not to be associated as Jews. After the decree was annulled, they resumed practicing them in public (Derashot Hakatan).

The Gemara elaborates on certain elements in the story of Joseph and his brothers. The verse states with regard to Joseph: “And he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck [tsavori] and wept” (Genesis 45:14). The wording of the verse gives rise to a question, as the word tsavori is plural, meaning necks: How many necks did Benjamin have, such that the verse should use the plural tsavori rather than the singular tsavor? Rabbi Elazar said: This intimates that Joseph cried over the two Temples that were destined to be in the tribal territory of Benjamin and were destined to be destroyed. The same verse continues: “And Benjamin wept on his neck” (Genesis 45:14); he cried over the tabernacle of Shiloh that was destined to be in the tribal territory of Joseph and was destined to be destroyed.

The verse states: “And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin” (Genesis 45:12). Rabbi Elazar said: Joseph said to his brothers as follows: Just as I certainly harbor no resentment in my heart toward my brother Benjamin, for he was not even present when I was sold, so too, I harbor no resentment toward you. The verse continues: “That it is my mouth [kefi] that speaks to you” (Genesis 45:12), i.e., As my mouth [kefi] is, so is my heart.

The Gemara asks: What are “the good things of Egypt” that are mentioned but not specified here? Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said that Rabbi Elazar said: He sent him aged wine, which the elderly find pleasing.

Following Jacob’s death, it states concerning Joseph: “And his brothers even went and fell down before him” (Genesis 50:18). Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said that Rabbi Elazar said: This explains the folk saying that people say: When the fox is in its hour, bow down to it, i.e., if a fox is appointed king, one must bow down before and submit oneself to it.

The Gemara expresses astonishment at the use of this parable: Are you calling Joseph a fox? What, was it inferior to his brothers such that in relation to them you call him a fox? Rather, if such a statement was stated, it was stated as follows, not in connection with this verse, but rather in connection with a different verse. The verse states: “And Israel bowed himself upon the head of the bed” (Genesis 47:31). With regard to this, Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said that Rabbi Elazar said: When the fox is in its hour, bow down to it, as Jacob had to bow down before his son Joseph, who had reached greatness.

It says with regard to Joseph’s remarks to his brothers: “And he comforted them and spoke to their hearts” (Genesis 50:21). Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said that Rabbi Elazar said: This teaches that he spoke to them words that are acceptable to the heart, and alleviated their fears. This is what he said: If ten lights could not put out one light, as all of you were unable to do me harm, how can one light put out ten lights?

The Gemara returns to its explanation of the Megilla. The verse states: “The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor” (Esther 8:16). Rav Yehuda said: “Light”; this is referring to the Torah that they once again studied. And similarly it says: “For the mitzva is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Proverbs 6:23). “Gladness” [simha]; this is referring to the Festivals that they once again observed. And similarly it says: “And you shall be glad [vesamukha] on your Festival” (Deuteronomy 16:14). “Joy” [sason]; this is referring to circumcision, as they once again circumcised their sons. And similarly it says: “I rejoice [zas] at your word” (Psalm 119:162), which the Sages understood as referring to David’s rejoicing over the mitzva of circumcision.
The vav in Vaizatha – וְיָרְאוּ תְּפִלִּין

One must extend the vav in the name Vaizatha. The Rema points out that this refers to extending the letter when writing it; he further explains that some say this refers to extending the sound when reading it (Shulchan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 691:4).

All of the songs in the Bible are written – וְלַעֲשֶׂרֶת בִּלְבָרֹת

One must write the songs in the Bible, e.g., the Song of the Sea, the Song of David, in a dispersed fashion, with the style of a whole brick on top of a half brick. If a song is written in the form of prose, as the rest of the Torah, it is invalid. If, however, it is written in a dispersed fashion, but in a different style than is traditionally done, for instance, it was written with a whole brick on top of a half brick, then it is valid (Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 275:3).

NOTES

Must be elongated as a pole – וְיָרְאוּ תְּפִלִּין

Some write that the letter vav here must be extended to be a larger vav (Meiri), while others write that the vav is written normally but must be read in an extended melody (Rid; Rabbi Aharon HaLevi). Still others understand that both of these explanations are correct and required (Rabbeinu Feinman), and some commentators write that this vav must be written in a unique form, with its head raised upward like a pillar (Ran; Rivah).

LANGUAGE

Ship (liberot) – מַעְרַכָּה: Possibly from the Greek λίμυρος, indicating a Liburnian ship, which was a large ship whose steering oars were understandably very large. Alternatively, Liberot is the name of a river or a lake (Arukh).

Writing the songs – גֵּבֵי תֵאשׁ: Usually the text of the Torah and the other books of the Bible is written closely spaced, with virtually no empty spaces in the writing, with the exception of the lengthier empty spaces in the text that are intended to act as breaks between portions or between books of the Torah. Songs in the Torah, on the other hand, are written differently, as blank spaces are placed in the text to differentiate between different sections of the verses. The songs are written in two different forms. One, like the Song of the Sea, is written in the style of a whole brick on top of a half brick and a half brick on top of a whole brick, meaning that the long and short rows are written on top of one another, as in the way a building is built. The second form is like the list of the ten sons of Haman, written as a whole brick on top of a whole brick and a half brick on top of a half brick, meaning that sections of the verses that are similar in length are placed one on top of another.

Background

The verse states: ‘And in Shushan the capital the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. And Parshandatha...and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman” (Esther 9:6–10). Rav Adda from Jaffa said: When reading the Megilla, the names of the ten sons of Haman and the word “ten” must be said in one breath. What is the reason for this? It is that their souls all departed together. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: The letter vav in the name “Vaizatha” is a lengthened vav and must be elongated as a pole, like a steering oar of a ship [liberot]. What is the reason for this? To indicate that they were all hanged on one pole.

Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa said that Rabbi Sheila, a man of the village of Timarta, interpreted a verse homiletically: All of the songs in the Bible are written in the form of a half brick arranged upon a whole brick and a whole brick arranged upon a half brick, i.e., each line of the song is divided into a stitch of text, referred to as a half brick, which is separated by a blank space, referred to as a whole brick, from the concluding stitch of that line of text.

The ten sons of Haman...In one breath – וְלַעֲשֶׂרֶת בִּלְבָרֹת

The names of the ten sons of Haman and the word “ten” must be said in one breath, in accordance with the opinion of Rav Adda, and this is specifically ab initio. After the fact, however, if the reader paused, he has fulfilled his obligation (see Tosafot). The Rema, based on the Maharil and others, says that it is customary to read in one breath from the words “five hundred” until and including the word “ten” (Shulchan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 690:15).

The song of the Torah, on the other hand, is written di diferentes, with a style of a whole brick on top of a half brick, then it is written homiletically: All of the songs in the Bible are written differently, with the exception of the lengthier empty spaces in the text that are intended to act as breaks between portions or between books of the Torah. Songs in the Torah, on the other hand, are written differently, as blank spaces are placed in the text to differentiate between different sections of the verses. The songs are written in two different forms. One, like the Song of the Sea, is written in the style of a whole brick on top of a half brick and a half brick on top of a whole brick, meaning that the long and short rows are written on top of one another, as in the way a building is built. The second form is like the list of the ten sons of Haman, written as a whole brick on top of a whole brick and a half brick on top of a half brick, meaning that sections of the verses that are similar in length are placed one on top of another.”

“Honor”, this is referring to phylacteries, which they once again donned. And similarly it says: “And all peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will be afraid of you” (Deuteronomy 28:10). And it was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Eliezer the Great said: This is referring to the phylacteries worn on the head. Haman had banned the fulfillment of all the mitzvot mentioned, but upon Haman’s demise the Jews returned to their observance.

After the fact, however, if the reader paused, he has fulfilled his obligation (see Tosafot). The Rema, based on the Maharil and others, says that it is customary to read in one breath from the thoughts “five hundred” until and including the word “ten” (Shulchan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 690:15).

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One must extend the vav in the name Vaizatha. The Rema points out that this refers to extending the letter when writing it; he further explains that some say this refers to extending the sound when reading it (Shulchan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 691:4).

All of the songs in the Bible are written – וְלַעֲשֶׂרֶת בִּלְבָרֹת

One must write the songs in the Bible, e.g., the Song of the Sea, the Song of David, in a dispersed fashion, with the style of a whole brick on top of a half brick. If a song is written in the form of prose, as the rest of the Torah, it is invalid. If, however, it is written in a dispersed fashion, but in a different style than is traditionally done, for instance, it was written with a whole brick on top of a half brick, then it is valid (Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De’ah 275:3).

NOTES

Must be elongated as a pole – וְיָרְאוּ תְּפִלִּין

Some write that the letter vav here must be extended to be a larger vav (Meiri), while others write that the vav is written normally but must be read in an extended melody (Rid; Rabbi Aharon HaLevi). Still others understand that both of these explanations are correct and required (Rabbeinu Feinman), and some commentators write that this vav must be written in a unique form, with its head raised upward like a pillar (Ran; Rivah).

LANGUAGE

Ship (liberot) – מַעְרַכָּה: Possibly from the Greek λίμυρος, indicating a Liburnian ship, which was a large ship whose steering oars were understandably very large. Alternatively, Liberot is the name of a river or a lake (Arukh).

Writing the songs – גֵּבֵי תֵאשׁ: Usually the text of the Torah and the other books of the Bible is written closely spaced, with virtually no empty spaces in the writing, with the exception of the lengthier empty spaces in the text that are intended to act as breaks between portions or between books of the Torah. Songs in the Torah, on the other hand, are written differently, as blank spaces are placed in the text to differentiate between different sections of the verses. The songs are written in two different forms. One, like the Song of the Sea, is written in the style of a whole brick on top of a half brick and a half brick on top of a whole brick, meaning that the long and short rows are written on top of one another, as in the way a building is built. The second form is like the list of the ten sons of Haman, written as a whole brick on top of a whole brick and a half brick on top of a half brick, meaning that sections of the verses that are similar in length are placed one on top of another.
Let it be said by mouth – הַסֵּפֶר״ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ. One interpretation of Esther’s request is that she asked Ahasuerus for permission to sanction the commemoration of the miracle and the reading of the Megilla aloud, although it could possibly be seen as slightly critical of the king (Ritva; see Or Hadas and Maharam Schiff). A second understanding is that Esther requested that the announcers should also proclaim this matter out loud for all to hear and not only distribute the letters (Ritva).

As the Torah itself – מִשִּׁירָה: The gelonim cite an alternative version of the text, which reads: As a true Torah; what does this refer to? It is like Elazar, and Moses, and the Elders, and the Naviim. This version of the text also appears in the Jerusalem Talmud (see Meiri). The gelonim explain this version of the text as referring to the episode with the daughters of Zelophehad, who had approached Moses, Elazar, and the princes of the tribes in their efforts to gain a portion of Eretz Yisrael. The message of the Gemara is therefore that even though the incidents recorded in the Megilla are heavily focused on the actions of women, such as Esther and Vashti, it represents the truth and essence of the Torah, and likewise should require scoring the parchment just as does the story of Zelophehad’s daughters in the Torah.

However, Rashbi and most of the early authorities explain that the intention of the Gemara is simply that the lines of a Megilla must be scored just as the lines of a Torah scroll are scored. Rabbeinu Hananel and the Arukh, as well as Rabbeinu Tam, whose explanation is recorded at length in the Sefer Hilshehar, explain that in fact a Torah scroll does not need to be scored, and that the Gemara is stating that a Megilla needs to be scored just as a mezuzah needs to be scored. They explain that a mezuzah is referred to as a true Torah, as it contains the Shema, which declares the essence of faith in the truth of God and of Torah. The Ritva, however, attempts to prove that Rashbi is correct based on the parallel passage in the Jerusalem Talmud.

The next line of the song inverts the sequence. This is the principle for all songs in the Bible except for this song, referring to the list of Haman’s sons, and the song listing the kings of Canaan who were defeated by Joshua. These two songs are written in the form of a half brick arranged upon a half brick and a whole brick arranged upon a whole brick, i.e., one string of text over another, and one blank space over another. What is the reason that these two songs are written in this anomalous fashion? So that they should never rise from their downfall. Just as a wall that is built in this manner will not stand, so too, these individuals should have no resurgence.

The verse states: “And the king said to Esther the queen: The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the capital, and also the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces? Now what is your petition and it shall be granted to you; and what more do you request, and it shall be done” (Esther 9:12). Rabbi Abbabah said: This teaches that an angel came and slapped him on his mouth, so that he was unable to finish what he was saying; he started with a complaint about what the Jews were doing, but ended on an entirely different note.

The verse states: “But when she came before the king, he said with a letter” (Esther 9:25). Why does it say: “He said”? It should have said: “She said,” as it was Esther who changed the decree. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: She said to Ahasuerus: Let it be said by word of mouth, indicating that that which is written in the letter should also be ordered verbally.

With regard to what is stated: “Words of peace and truth” (Esther 9:30), Rabbi Tanhum said, and some say that Rabbi Asi said: This teaches that a Megilla scroll requires scoring, i.e., that the lines for the text must be scored onto the parchment, as the Torah itself, i.e., as is done in a Torah scroll.

The verses say: “The matters of the fasts and their cry. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim” (Esther 9:31–32). The Gemara asks: Should we say that “the decree of Esther” indeed confirmed these matters of Purim, but “the matters of the fasts” did not? But didn’t the fasts also contribute to the miracle? Rabbi Yoḥanan said: These two verses, “The matters of the fasts and their cry. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim,” should be read as one.

The verse states: “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. They felt that this was a mistake and that he should have remained active on the Sanhedrin.

HALAKHA

The ten sons of Haman – יָוְאָשָׁר אֶסְתֵּר אָבָהוּ. The ten sons of Haman must be written in the Megilla as a song, in a manner different from the standard writing. However, the passage is not written like other songs, with blank spaces above the words. Rather, the blank spaces are between the words, and the lines of words are written on top of one another. This is the only valid way to write this portion of the Megilla. It is stated in the Jerusalem Talmud that the word “man” [ם] should ideally be written in the beginning of the folio of the Megilla and the word “and” [וְ] at the end of it. Nevertheless, the Megam Avraham holds that if it is not written in this manner it is valid, while the Sheyarei Kesenet HaGalدل writes that it is invalid (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 691:3–4).

A Megilla scroll requires scoring — מִשְּרוּט. The Megilla parchment must be scored before it is written, just as is done with a Torah scroll. However, it is enough to score the first line (Megam Avraham, citing Levis), though the Hakham Tzvi and the Vilna Gaon disagree, saying that all lines require scoring (Shulhan Aruk, Orah Hayyim 691:1).
Rav Yosef said: Studying Torah is greater than saving lives, as initially, when listing the Jewish leaders who came to Eretz Yisrael, 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 2:1), 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).

Rav said, and some say that Rav Shmuel bar Marta said: Studying Torah is greater and more important that building the Temple. A proof of this is that for as long as Baruch ben Neriah was alive in Babylonia, Ezra, who was his disciple, did not leave him and go up to Eretz Yisrael to build the Temple.

Rabba said that Rav Yitzhak bar Shmuel bar Marta said: Studying Torah is greater and more important than honoring one’s father and mother, and a proof of this is that for all those years that our father Jacob spent in the house of Eber and studied Torah there he was not punished for having neglected to fulfill the mitzva of honoring one’s parents. As the Master said:

Why were the years of Ishmael mentioned in the Torah? For what purpose were we told the life span of that wicked man? In order to reckon through them the years of Jacob. As it is written: “And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, a hundred and thirty-seven years” (Genesis 25:17). How much older was Ishmael than Isaac? Fourteen years. As it is written: “And Abram was eighty-six years old when he brought Sarah to Abram” (Genesis 16:16). And it is written: “And Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him” (Genesis 21:5). And it is written with regard to Jacob and Esau: “And Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them” (Genesis 25:26). Based on these verses, how old was Ishmael when Jacob was born? Seventy-four. How many of his years remained then until his death? Sixty-three, as Ishmael died at the age of a hundred and thirty-seven.

And it was taught in a baraita: Jacob our father was sixty-three years old at the time he was blessed by his father, and at that same time Ishmael died. Is it known that these two events occurred at the same time? As it is written: “When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and Esau went to Ishmael, and took for a wife Malath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth” (Genesis 28:6-9). From the fact that it is stated: “the daughter of Ishmael,” do I not know that she was the sister of Nebaioth? For what purpose then does the verse say this explicitly? This teaches that Ishmael betrothed her to Esau and in the meantime he died, and Nebaioth her brother married her off. Therefore, special mention is made of Nebaioth. Consequently, it is understood that Jacob was sixty-three years old when he received his blessing and left his father’s house.