



# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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## Light Insight

### *Esther's Choice*

by Nicole Landau

At a glance, the story of Purim is fantastical, whimsical even, a coincidence-ridden fanciful tale that one really wants to believe. The king kills his queen. Esther ascends to the throne. Her cousin Mordechai overhears a scheme to kill the king, saves him, and in the end Esther and Mordechai together save the Jewish people. On the surface, these seem like disconnected, random events. And where, we ask, is G-d in all of this?

Learning a little about Esther may help us answer this question. The verses tell us of what happened when Esther was first brought before the king as a candidate for becoming the new queen:

*Now when the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Avichayil uncle of Mordechai, to come before the king, she requested nothing. (Esther 2:15)*

This refers to Esther's refusal to use the cosmetics provided to every candidate for queen. The commentator known as the Menos Halevi asks why she did this and why her family is mentioned at this point. He explains that instead of being seduced by the material wealth and glory attendant on becoming queen, Esther focused on her spiritual treasure, her heritage. As a result, she did not request makeup in the hope

that she would be rejected and sent home to her family. Physical pleasure was not what she sought. To Esther, the deeper, hidden world was far more real.

The very name of the book we read on Purim hints at this idea: *Megillat Esther*, the Scroll of Esther. In Hebrew, the word Esther is related to the word *nistar*, meaning hidden, and the word *megillah* is related to the word *megaleh*, meaning to reveal. Thus the Megillah of Esther can be literally translated as the revelation of that which is hidden. Esther's name and essence are one. She focused on what is important and meaningful, even though it might be hidden from the eye.

Then and now, G-d's Presence is not readily visible. In fact, G-d's Name is not mentioned once throughout the entire megillah. Yet Esther makes her choice. She does not perceive the honor of becoming queen as real. She calls on that which is inner, deeper, and hidden. She prays to the G-d Whom she knows is present. In the face of a decree of extinction hanging over the Jewish people, she calls for a three-day fast, for Esther understands that by temporarily suspending the physical aspects of reality (such as eating), the deeper spiritual world is brought within reach. By initially evading the role of queen by refusing makeup, and later, by risking her position in the palace and her life by approaching the king without being summoned, Esther reaches past the phys-

ical and dedicates herself to her Jewish identity, inspiring the entire Jewish people, then and now, to do the same.

### *The Inside Story*

Why do we put on our finest clothes for Shabbat? One reason is to give honor to this special day. But there's another reason.

Another question: When the *kohanim* performed the service of the Holy Temple they had to wear special garments, and without these garments the service was invalid. Why didn't the *levi'im*, who also served in the Temple, have to wear special clothes as well?

The service of the *kohen* is internal. It takes place in private away from the eyes of the world. Anything internal requires covering. The soul, which is internal, requires covering when it comes to this world with the body. Spiritual envoys — angels — require a body when they enter this earthly dimension.

The work of a *Levi* is external, in public. The *levi'im* used to play musical instruments and sing in the Temple. Since their work was external it didn't require special garments.

Shabbat, too, is the dimension of the internal in this world. Shabbat shows us the inside of Creation, the center and the purpose of life. Since it reveals that which is internal, it needs covering — and thus we dress ourselves in special clothes on this special day.

## Response Line

### What Became of Esther?

*Name@Withheld wrote:*

*Are there any sources regarding what happened to Queen Esther after the traditional story ended? What became of her? Did she have children? Etc.? Thanks.*

Dear Name@Withheld,

While we do not know a lot about what happened to Esther, one thing that we do know is that she had a son, Darius, who became King Darius II. She brought him up to be favorable to the Jews and he eventually lifted the ban against the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, which led to the building of the Second Temple.

### Poppy Seed Purim

*Rose Hill wrote:*

*What is the issue of eating seeds (as in poppy seeds) on Purim? I read there was such a thing on an Ohr Somayach web site. Thanks.*

Dear Rose,

The role that "seeds" played in the story of Esther is that in the king's palace, Esther ate seeds in order to observe the Torah's command to eat only kosher food. This way, she was able to have a healthy, caloric diet while avoiding the royal yet unkosher meat and wine fed to the other queen candidates.

### Proper Etiquette

*Tova in Kansas City wrote:*

*I am a non-Jew. Recently, I was told by a friend of a Jewish custom in which during a visit to another's home for a meal, the dinner napkin is folded in a certain way by the guest at the end of the meal. This supposedly signifies that the guest will return in the future. If not, the napkin will be folded or crumpled in another way. Can you tell me anything about this?*

Dear Tova,

No, I can't. It sounds quite interesting, if not a bit bizarre, yet I've never heard of it.

I doubt that it has any Jewish roots. According to tradition, we don't use napkins, but rather wipe our hands on our beards (just kidding!)

To all our readers

**A HAPPY PURIM!**

