

# Parsha Ponders

Purim | Mar 21, 2024 | 11 Adar II 5784

## *The constant prayer*<sup>1</sup>

ומרדכי יצא מלפני המלך בלבוש מלכות תכלת וחור ועטרת זהב גדולה ותכריך בוץ ואגרמן והעיר שושן צהלה ושמחה

Mordechai went out from before the king adorned in royal clothing of *techeiles* and white<sup>2</sup>, a large gold crown, and a linen cloak with purple wool<sup>3</sup>, and the city of Shushan was jubilant and rejoicing<sup>4</sup>

שושנת יעקב צהלה ושמחה בראותם יחד תכלת מרדכי

The rose of Yaakov was jubilant and rejoicing when they all saw together the *techeiles* of Mordechai<sup>5</sup>

When Mordechai heard about the terrible decree against the Jews, his first reaction was to tear his clothing. He wore sackcloth and ashes, left the king's gate, and prayed<sup>6</sup>. He screamed and yelled for salvation from Hashem. Now, what would have been the reaction of the average person? Let's say someone had a sister who was married to the king, a king who had just issued a terrible decree. One's first reaction normally would have been to immediately request one's sister to intercede to annul the decree.

However, Mordechai was told about the decree through prophecy. He knew the reason for this decree, for it was due to the sins of the Jews<sup>7</sup>. The only solution to this problem was to rectify its cause. He knew he needed to pray for Hashem's forgiveness. This is the way of prayer for the righteous, with sackcloth and ashes<sup>8</sup>. This meant that Mordechai could no longer enter the palace<sup>9</sup>. He was forced to send a messenger to inform Esther of what happened, so that she would pray as well. One might have thought that it would have been more effective to go in person, for that would have given Esther a greater impression of the present danger<sup>10</sup>. Mordechai even refused to change into the fresh garments Esther sent to him. Mordechai didn't want to sacrifice a second of his prayers, and instead sent a messenger<sup>11</sup>.

When the decree was lifted, the verse tells us that Mordechai was granted special royal clothing, made up of various colors and materials. The verse then tells us that the city of Shushan was jubilant and rejoicing. The Brisker Rav had a *chakira*, two ways of looking at this verse. Is the fact that the city of Shushan was rejoicing a separate statement? Or is it somehow connected to the fact that Mordechai went out in royal clothing? He resolves this question with the popular *piyut* that is sung after the *Megillah: Shoshanas Ya'akov*. We say that the Jewish people rejoiced upon seeing the *techeiles* of Mordechai. This can be read to be an allusion to the royal clothing that Mordechai wore, and we see this

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Shalmei Todah Purim, Pesicha § 5, by Rav Shalom Felman of Bnei Brak

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ezra Tinyana ad. loc.

<sup>3</sup> See Ta'amah D'Krah ad. loc. by Rav Chaim Kanievsky on why this wasn't an issue of *sha'atnez*

<sup>4</sup> Esther 8:15

<sup>5</sup> This is part of the larger *Asher Heini piyut*, mentioned in many Ashkenazi *halachic seforim* such as Machzor Vitri § 248 (he writes that this *piyut* is from the foundations of the *Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah*), Shibolei HaLeKet § 200, Rokeah HaGadol Hilchos Purim § 237, Maharil Hilchos Purim § 5

<sup>6</sup> Esther 4:1

<sup>7</sup> Rashi ad. loc.

<sup>8</sup> See Esther Rabbah 10:9

<sup>9</sup> Esther 4:2

<sup>10</sup> See Sifsei Chaim Moadim II p. 180, by Rav Chaim Friedlander

<sup>11</sup> Biur HaGra to Esther 4:4

was the cause of the joy of the Jews. However, this begs the question: Why were they so jubilant upon seeing Mordechai in royal clothing?

The reason is that the Jews were certain that if Mordechai didn't know that the decree was totally abolished, he never would have abandoned his sackcloth and ashes. Why were they so certain? We know that towards the end of the *Megillah*, Haman was ordered to escort Mordechai in royal clothing. However, the verse says that right after the whole parade, Mordechai went right back to the king's gate<sup>12</sup>. He went straight back to his sackcloth and ashes<sup>13</sup>. The reason is that although this whole episode was a blow to Haman and his ego, the decree still loomed. However, at the end of the story, when the Jews saw that Mordechai was fully free from his prayers for salvation, they knew with certainty that it had in fact arrived<sup>14</sup>.

Good Shabbos and A *Freilichen* Purim!

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<sup>12</sup> Esther 6:12

<sup>13</sup> Esther Rabbah 10:6

<sup>14</sup> Rav Yechiel Michel Feinstein, the son-in-law of the Brisker Rav, in the name of the Brisker Rav