

The Jews of the world are in peril. There is a decree to kill all the Yehudim/Jews. Mordechai asks his cousin and ward, Hadassah—who is now Queen Esther—to be the intervenor on behalf of their people. She makes a request:

לְךָ כְּנֹס אֶת-כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאֶל-תְּאֲכִלוּ וְאֶל-תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם גַּם-אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אֲצוּם כֵּן וּבָכֵן אָבֹא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-כֹדֶת וְכֹאֲשֶׁר אֲבָדְתִי אֲבָדְתִי:

“Go, gather all of the Yehudim that are found in Shushan, and make a fast on me; do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. And also, I and my maidservants will fast similarly. And so, I will go, to the king, that is against the rules, and as such I will surely perish and be lost.” (Esther 4:16).

When did these three days take place? Did they, in fact, take place? The date of the decree was eleven months hence, so why could Esther not simply wait a few days to see if the king called to her; this in order to avoid risking her life? Also, why is the custom to fast on the 13th of Adar when the actual fasting did not occur then?

Gemara Megillah 15a has a dispute on when these three days occurred. Rav said the decree came out 13th of Nisan. Mordechai did not fast on Pesach. The fasts were then 14th, they skipped Pesach first day, and commenced, 16, and 17th. Shmuel says the fasts were the 14th, 15th, and 16th.

Relying on the simple reading of the Megillah and using this Gemara, almost all popular commentaries take the view that the Jews did not celebrate Pesach that year, but instead fasted. The order of events was that the decree came out, Mordechai coordinated with Esther through messenger, the entire Shushan Jewish population fasted for three days, and then Esther approached the king on the 17th of Nisan.

Given that the threat was eleven months away it seems perplexing that the Jews fasted on Pesach and that Esther risked her life to come to the king uninvited. A comprehensive look at the wording in the Megillah actually proves that not only did the Jews of Shushan keep Pesach that year (eating matzo and holding a seder), but the fast days may never have actually taken place.

Rashi points out the dual ‘against the law’ meanings. *It was first against the rules because the king had a rule that he is only with a woman, queen or from the harem, when he summons her. Second, she was forced all of these times, so there was no sin to be with a goy. Now, she was going voluntarily. That is the double meaning ‘I shall surely perish and be lost.’*

Mordechai does something odd. He learns of the King’s decree to kill all the Jews and his immediate reaction was to rend his clothes and don sackcloth. (Esther 4:1). Contrary to how Gemara Megillah categorizes the need for fast days on Pesach, Mordechai does not act in haste. He actually just sits *before* the King’s Gate. (Ibid 4:2). He did not sit *in* the King’s Gate because he was wearing sackcloth. This is likely either the 13th or 14th of Nisan (erev Pesach). Further, there was no need for Mordechai to tell anyone to fast because as the decree was sent around the kingdom in the days ahead, all the Jews lamented and fasted; on their own. (Ibid 4:3).

Mordechai makes no effort to contact Esther during this time. It is actually Esther that notices that Mordechai was not sitting in the King’s Gate and she sent her servants to inquire after him. (Ibid 4:4-6). After Hasach found Mordechai and Mordechai showed him the decree, did

Mordechai suggest that Esther beseech the king. (Ibid 4:7). Esther objected, saying thirty days had passed without the king summoning her and it should be just a few more days for the king to summon her. (Ibid 4:11). She would wait and do this by rule; wait to be summoned. (Ibid).

At this point Mordechai suddenly acts with urgency. He tells Esther, do not think you will escape the decree. (Ibid 4:13). “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and rescue will arise for the Jews from elsewhere, and you and your father's household will perish; and who knows whether at a time like this you were positioned in the kingdom?” (Ibid 4:14). To this urgency, Esther, according to Gemara Megillah, does not hasten to visit the king. Instead, she asks for three days of fasting—day and night—and then she will visit the king. (Ibid 4:16). Mordechai was appeased with this. (Ibid 4:17).

This is how the Megillah reads. Mordechai received the decree on the 14th. He immediately donned sackcloth and lamented. He davened and sought inspiration. He removed himself from the King's Gate on two accounts. First, it was against the rules to sit there wearing sackcloth. (Ibid 4:2). Second, he wanted Esther to notice that he was missing. Mordechai knew one thing: the next day was Pesach and the 15th day of Nisan has a special day of Redemption for the Jews. This goes back to Lot being saved and the Bnei Yisroel's exit from Mitzrayim. The decree came down just in time for the one day a year for HaShem to save the entire Jewish people.

He would task Esther as the messenger, as he saw divine providence that she was made queen, years before, for this very moment. If not, salvation would come regardless. What convinced Esther to go to the king? Mordechai used the words “אל־תִּדְמִי בְּנַפְשְׁךָ” “do not think your soul will be spared.” (Ibid 4:13). He uses the words נפש and דם and these words harken to “by these bloods you shall live.” (Yechezkel 16:6). In Mitzryaim, the redemption came through blood on the doorposts. The korban Pesach cannot be eaten by someone who is not circumcised (blood of milah). Mordechai was reminding Esther, *tonight is Pesach night. This is the night of blood and when HaShem spared us and did not strike our firstborn. This is the Night of Watching and the Night of Redemption.* He was so sure of this that he tells her if she remains silent or carries then redemption will come some other way. (Ibid 4:14).

Now, the Megillah itself tells us the night that Esther sought the king was the seder night, 15th of Nisan. Esther made a ‘*wine banquet.*’ (Ibid 5:6). The seder is a wine banquet, as the first couple of hours the only food served, really, is wine. Even when food comes, the entire seuda is surrounded by four cups of wine.

Further proof is, it says, “on that night” the king could not sleep. (Ibid 6:1). The Megillah uses the words “בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא.” The Torah uses that exact term for night when talking about the final mako on Mitzrayim and the night of Pesach. “בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא.” (Shemos 12:8 and 12). Here the Megillah is telling us the king could not sleep the night of the 15th of Nisan. בַּלַּיְלָה is common denominator.

The Gemara does seem to rely on simple wording of the Megillah regarding the three days. It does say, “And it was on the third day, that Esther clothed herself.” (Ibid 5:1). However, that is not how the pesukim are to be read. Our passuk tells us for Mordechai to gather all of the Jews in Shushan in order to fast for three days, night and days. That request itself is puzzling as that would kill out the Jews of Shushan.

Gemara Yevomos 121b, *states that not being able to eat or drink for three consecutive days is a miracle.* The request must be something else. Gemara Sofrim 12:1 says, *the fast of Esther is not observed in Eretz Israel for one day, but for three days: Monday, Thursday, Monday, behab, following Purim.* If Esther was asking them to fast the following Monday, Thursday, Monday, while that would be easier on their health, it also goes against the urgency. Further, Pesach never falls out on Monday. The three days would have to start the following week after Pesach is over.

Esther also did not ask for the king's help immediately. Instead, she asked for a second seuda. If there was urgency, why did she push it off another day?

Finally, if Mordechai was fasting the third day (Esther approached on the third day) then how could he sit in the King's Gate? (Ibid 5:9). Haman leaves the first party on that day and sees Mordechai *in the King's Gate*. He must have removed his sackcloth. He would not do so if he was still fasting. Additionally, our passuk says that Esther wanted the fasting to be night and day. The fasting could not commence the 14th by day. It would have to start the 15th at night through 17th until sunset.

Mordechai received the decree on the 13th later in the day, or morning of the 14th of Nisan. He then corresponds with Esther and they make a plan. She will go to the king immediately. That night is their best hope. It is the Night of Redemption. Even though it is against the king's rules, she will initiate the meeting. It is the Night of Shemira and she has faith. "On that third day" means the third day from the *decree*, not the third day of fasting. Decree is day 13 of Nisan, so third day is the 15th of Nisan; partial days count. "On the third day" means it was the very beginning of the third day. Night precedes daylight in Jewish days, it was seder night.

On the seder night she comes to the king at his house (Ibid 5:1) and invites him to a party that night. They "rush" to get Haman. (Ibid 5:5). Esther also asks for a party the following evening. (Ibid 5:8). That night, the seder night, the king could not sleep. His sleep was disturbed because salvation must come. In fact, Mordechai is now honored for a decade old debt of the king. (Ibid 6:10). At this point, no one fasted yet. It was Pesach. Mordechai donned his regular clothing for Yom Tov and sat *in the King's Gate*.

That next night was a *sfeka deyoma* for Shushan, i.e. the diaspora. It was unclear if Pesach was calendared that day or the following day. True, *sfeka deyoma* did not really come into effect until messengers had to be sent out, post the Second Beis HaMikdash era, but in Shushan there would be a *sfeka deyoma*. There was no standing Beis Din in Eretz Yisrael at the time lighting fire signals. Gedaliah and his government were already destroyed at this point. Esther made sure she commenced her request on the 15th and concluded it on the second night of yom tov for diaspora.

Even without *sfeka deyoma*, the Megillah keeps telling us that Haman was rushed. The window for redemption was narrow and Esther used it. Again, she had a *wine banquet*, seder two for diaspora Jews. (Ibid 7:2). If the Jews fasted, it was the Monday, Thursday, Monday after Pesach. It was certainly sometime after Esther saved the Jews, done in fulfillment of the promise Mordechai made to fast. Rav says Mordechai did not fast on Pesach. The fast of Esther these days is on Adar, on the day that the Jews struck down their enemies. Jews fast because killing HaShem's creations, even enemies, is a tragic event. The true bliss is when the entire world will know HaShem. Now, in exile, it is tragedy that Jews have to fight their lives, kill or be killed. That is one reason of what the fast is for.

The custom the Purim seuda has wine is not merely follow some drunken gentiles. It is as a reminder that the miracle and redemption from the Purim decree came about through the *wine banquet* of the seder night.