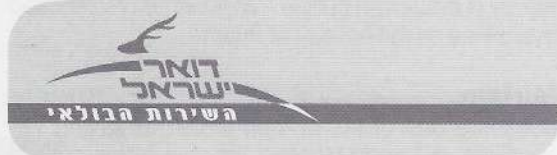


אלול התשס"ז ■ 8/2007 ■ 775



אסתר היא אחת משתי נשים מקראיות שספר נקרא על שמן (השנייה היא רות). מעניין לעקוב אחר תהליך ההעצמה שעבר על אסתר במהלך המגילה והפיכתה מאובייקט לסובייקט: מנערה יתומה ויפה הנלקחת להרמון המלך אחשוורוש - מקום שבו מגיעים ניצול הנשים ותפיסתן כחפצים לדרגה קיצונית - הופכת אסתר המלכה לאישה שהצילה את עמה מגזרת ההשמדה שהגה המן. לא מייד נענתה אסתר לדרישת דודה מרדכי שתפעל לביטול הגזרה. תחילה הביעה את חששותיה, שהרי אחשוורוש לא זימנה אליו מזה חודש, ואם תעז להופיע לפניו ללא הזמנה - דינה מוות, אלא אם כן יושיט לה המלך את שרביט הזהב ('אס' ד, יא). אולם בהמשך קיבלה על עצמה את המשימה, והורתה למרדכי: "לֵךְ בְּנוֹס אֶת כָּל הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁן וְצֹמֵז עָלֶי וְאַל תֵּאָכְלוּ וְאַל תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים לִילָה וַיּוֹם גַּם אֲנִי וְנַעֲרַתִּי

Festivals 2007 - Women in the Bible

The Bible reflects a patriarchal society in which the status of women is secondary to that of men from a sociological and legal standpoint. Nevertheless, women are not depicted as inferior to men, morally or intellectually. The biblical narrative portrays a significant number of women as impressive figures who reveal intelligence, initiative and courage, many of whom also exert influence on the destiny of the entire Israelite people. Miriam, Jael and Esther are three examples of these types of women.

Jael

Jael, wife of Hever the Kenite, is the person who strikes the final chord in Israel's war against the Canaanites by killing Sisera, the Canaanite general under King Yavin of Hatzor, who had fled to her tent in search of refuge. Jael came out to greet Sisera, invited him into her tent, and gave him milk to drink (apparently to induce him to sleep), covered him with a blanket, and after he fell asleep killed him with a tent stake and a hammer. Apparently, Jael's act was also prompted by the close relationship between the Israelites and the Kenite family of Hever, whose children were the descendants of Moses' father-in-law (see Judges 4:11). Jael is praised for her act in the Song of Deborah: "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (Judges 5:24).

Esther

Esther is one of the two biblical women for whom a book in the Bible is named (the other is Ruth). It is interesting to trace the process of empowerment that Esther undergoes as her story unfolds in the scroll and as she changes from object to subject: from a pretty orphan girl taken to King Ahasuerus's harem – a place where the exploitation of women and the perception of them as objects reaches an extreme. Esther the Queen becomes the woman who saves her people from the decree of annihilation conceived by Haman. She did not immediately agree to her Uncle Mordecai's demand to try to annul the decree. Initially, she was fearful, for Ahasuerus had not called for her for a month, and if she dared appear before him unbidden, her fate would be death unless he held out his golden scepter (Esther 4:11). However, she eventually accepted the mission, instructing Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day; I also and my maidens will fast in like manner; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). This marks a turning point in the projection of Esther's image and in her metamorphosis from a passive to an active figure. She herself conceived and implemented the plan that led to the hanging of Haman, scourge of the Jews; and to the

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rescue of the Jewish people – an event commemorated ever since on the holiday of Purim.

Miriam

Miriam is one of six women linked to saving the Israelites, or saving Moses – the savior of Israel – in the story of the redemption from Egypt (the other five women are the two midwives Shifrah and Puah; Yocheved, Moses' mother; Pharaoh's daughter; and Moses' wife, Zipporah).

When Yocheved hid Moses in the wicker basket along the bank of the river to save him from Pharaoh's decree "Every son that will be born – into the River shall you throw him" (Exodus 1:22), it was his sister Miriam who watched over him from afar. After Moses was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter, Miriam showed initiative and offered to bring a Hebrew wet nurse to her – none other than the baby's mother, Yocheved. In the story of the redemption from Egypt Miriam is portrayed as a leader and a prophet: after the crossing of the Red Sea, Miriam the prophetess led all the women in a religious folk ceremony in which she reiterated the Song of the Sea with them, recited previously by Moses and the Children of Israel: "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took her drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances. Miriam spoke to them, "Sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea" (Exodus 15:20-21). The prophet Micah mentions Miriam, side by side with her two brothers, as one of the leaders raised by Hashem for His people: "For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron and Miriam" (Micah 6:4).

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