

A Dance of Harmony



A Gutten Chodesh, Dear Friends,

In just two weeks, we'll be hearing the proclamation of Achashveirosh: *All men shall forthwith be rulers in their homes* (Esther 1:22). The words bring out an ironic smile.

What a masculine approach! A royal decree. A law. Force, backed by the monarch. For what purpose? To restore the previous equilibrium between masculine and feminine. It's so ridiculous that it's laughable.

But it also points to a deep dynamic that we find throughout the Megillah.



From Vashti's rebellion, through Esther's appointment as queen, her quiet rise to power and eventually, her joining Mordechai to write down the Megillah for all generations—a conversation is playing out. A dialogue between the inner energies of man and woman, the *kochos* of masculinity and femininity, what they mean and where they belong and their place in the reality that is today—and the reality that is slowly being born.

Before we dive in, as we've mentioned many times before—and we examine in detail in our marriage book, *Secrets of the Well*—let's briefly define the powers of masculinity and femininity.

Vashti and Esther represent different types of femininity, but when we talk about femininity we don't simply mean a woman. We mean the energy of the feminine: *Binah*—the ability to make deep connections, the power to look inside and find the inner meaning of life, the

primacy of relationships, and the whole beating heart of the internal world that is the reign of the feminine.

The masculine energy, which we see used and abused in the Megillah, is that of movement and conquering, it's the ability to shape the external environment and be *mashpia* on the world. Achashveirosh and Haman show this ability in its lower form; Mordechai represents the higher level of masculinity—a leadership that does not dominate but collaborates, carrying the people with him. He incorporates the “feminine voice” in the same way that he wrote the Megillah together with Esther—a seamless marriage of masculine and feminine *kochos*.

The story begins of course, with Vashti's refusal to submit to her husband. This act of rebellion may have seemed like modesty, but the *mefarshim* explain that Vashti had enacted a power struggle: I am the daughter of

Nevuchadnezzar and you are a nothing. All that you have is because of me. Ego met a drive for power, and the result was disaster.

Vashti makes a swift exit from the stage of the Megillah. Enter Esther, the antithesis of her predecessor: taciturn and dutiful. Esther says nothing about her origins, **and her midah of silence and internality is so strong** that when Mordechai begins a public fast day, wearing sackcloth, she sends him respectable clothing. She is telling him: publicity is not our way. Our teshuva takes place deep inside (Sefas Emes).

Light of the Moon

Hadassah's name of Esther, Chazal tell us, derives from the word *Istahar*, meaning moon (Megillah 13a). The moon carries deep symbolism. Klal Yisrael is compared to the moon—and the nations of the world are compared to the sun (Succah 29a). As the moon waxes and wanes, klal Yisrael's fortune has shifted, grown and diminished. It's no wonder that both Purim and Pesach fall out in the middle of the month, **when the moon is full and klal Yisrael's spiritual strength is at its peak.**

The sun and moon also correspond to masculine and feminine energies. At the beginning of time, when they were created, Chazal tell us (Chullin 60b), the sun and moon argued over who would rightly wear the crown of the luminaries. The moon was told to “diminish itself” and with it, the status of the feminine became less than that of the masculine.

In comparing Esther to the moon, therefore,

Chazal highlight her journey: **from a thin crescent of light in a dark sky to a full, glowing orb.** Esther's spiritual strength as a woman slowly grew, until she was ready to bring the salvation.

What was the turning point? At what juncture did this change occur?

The change came, according to the *baalei chassidus*, when Esther approached Achashveirosh to invite him to the feasts she prepared. On the first occasion, it says that although she approached without being summoned, Achashveirosh held out his royal scepter, and “she touched the head of the scepter” (Esther 5:2). The second time, the pasuk states “He stretched out the golden scepter to Esther” (Esther 8:4). The *baal HaTanya* writes that in fact, Achashveirosh *handed Esther his scepter*. At that moment, the royal scepter was transferred from male hands to female. **The inner strength of femininity reached fruition.** Vashti may have seemed like a feminist champion, but it was Esther who entered the masculine stronghold of Achashveirosh and transformed it.

The Moon's Hidden Majesty

How did she do this? Echoing the moon in the original discussion between the luminaries, Esther “made herself small”. She put her own plans to the side, and was willing to sacrifice both her *olam hazeh* and her *olam haba* for the sake of Hashem's design. She made herself as the moon, which has no independent light and only reflects the light of the sun. In this way, we learn, “*vatilbash Esther malchus*”. She

wore majesty. The Jewish concept of majesty is not pomp and pageantry. It's having a heart that submits totally to the ratzon Hashem, that simply wants to reflect Hashem's glory in this world. And so, the royal line of Dovid Hamelech is compared to the moon, for in essence, Dovid sought only to bring Hashem's Shechinah—His Malchus into the world.

This is the key to Haman's downfall, Achashveirosh's pliability, and the ultimate triumph of the Jews. If at the beginning of the Megillah, the status of women had been trampled upon—and correspondingly, the energy of femininity diminished—through the process of the Megillah, a deeper feminine energy is identified—and is uplifted.

And that's not all—this new harmony between the inner energy of the feminine and that of the masculine is emphasized at the end of the Megillah. Esther and Mordechai—feminine and masculine work together in the palace. Together, they write down the Megillah and together, they declare that it will be a lasting yom tov, for all generations. The dance between the energies of masculinity and femininity, so out of sync at the beginning of time, has been brought together in harmony—and it yields offspring. The second Beis Hamikdash was a direct result of the restoration of the feminine.

The Rise of The Feminine

A pasuk in Yirmiyahu (31:21) brings this change into focus:

עד מתי תתחמקין הבת השובבה כי ברא ה' חדשה בארץ נקבה
תסובב גבר.

Until when will you hide, mischievous daughter, for Hashem created a new state in the land a woman will circle a man.

Two terms are used here for klal Yisrael. At first, she is a “mischievous daughter”, running away from Hashem and plunging into the distractions and attractions of idolatry—or the modern-day equivalent. The Navi implores her: leave behind girlhood and embrace womanhood. When that happens, even if you once ran away from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, now He will come close to you.

This refers, according to the *mefarshim*, to the end of days, when the inner strengths of the feminine will once again flourish. In today's world, women are courageously drawing on their strengths and emunah to face today's challenges, unafraid to guide their families through challenges and navigate a confusing world.

But not only do we already feel this shift in today's world, we can strengthen it. One of the ways we can do so is through tefillah.

The Harmony of Prayer

The *sifrei chassidus* explain (*Likutei Moharan* 15:5,11)

When klal Yisrael daven before Hashem, it is as if a role reversal takes place. Usually, Hakadosh Baruch Hu adopts a masculine role: He is the *mashpia*, and Klal Yisrael is the *mekabel*. He sends down life, health, and parnassah, which

4 | A Dance of Harmony

we receive with open arms. But when we daven, a switch occurs. The act of tefillah, as we've examined in depth in previous emails, is not simply a polite way of presenting Heaven with our much-needed shopping list. It goes far, far deeper. By acknowledging Hashem as the Source of all, something inside can unclench. When we feel that Hashem is holding the reins, we don't have to hold quite so tight. **When we can shift our tefillah into a mindset not only of results, but of connection, we can feel energized and comforted.**

That doesn't mean that we don't care. It doesn't mean we don't bring our problems before Hashem. It means striving for a level of serenity that comes when someone whispers in your ear, don't worry, it will all be taken care of. It might not unfold the way we imagined—but if we open up to it, we will find a new kind of beauty.

This kind of davening elicits a special Divine reaction. **When we show our desire for closeness, then Hashem responds by drawing near.** In other words, it is as if klal Yisrael has taken on the masculine role of being a *mashpia*—and that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the *mekabel*, for He reacts, as it were, to our longing for Him.

A beautiful synchronicity is then achieved: for in reaction to our *tefillos*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu then pours down Shefa upon us, once again becoming *mashpia* as we are *mekabel*, the beneficiaries of His endless love. We turn to Him once again with thanks and prayer, again switching roles to become the *mashpia*, in an endless cycle that brings us to a place of oneness with Hakadosh Baruch Hu—a zivug.

It is no wonder, then, that our *tefillos* on Purim have a special power. Through the spiritual work of Mordechai and Esther, Purim marks a day when the inner energies of masculinity and femininity find harmony. *Mashpia* and *mekabel* together form a beautiful marriage. And so it is in our tefillah. On Purim we infuse the quality of *ad delo yada* into our davening. For one lofty day, we embrace a state in which we may not know or understand, but like a fetus in its mother's womb, we are at peace. It's a day when we can find in ourselves the ability to pray from that place that longs not only for results, but for connection. In doing so, we transform ourselves from our natural role of *mekabel* into *mashpia*. Not only do we want to receive from Hashem—we are able to be a *mashpia*, initiating a Heavenly response. The inner *kochos* of masculinity and femininity are wedded—and klal Yisrael is bonded to our Father in Heaven.

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It's Rosh Chodesh Adar Sheini, that extra month that comes with the leap year, *shenas ha'ibbur*. The Jewish calendar is unique in that it does not only follow the moon, as do the Moslems, and we don't disregard the moon and follow the Sun, as does Western Society. We integrate the two systems, with months that are determined by the wax and wane of the moon, but years that are determined by the earth's orbit around the sun. Pesach, the Torah tells us, must always take place in the spring. And with that comes the obligation to find harmony between the two ways of marking time. **We integrate both systems of counting.**

On a deeper level, this means that we harmonize the inner strengths of the sun and moon, of masculinity and femininity. We do this on every level: as a society, in our homes, and inside each and every one of us. [We acknowledge the soft voice of connection, while appreciating the masculine powers of achievement, enterprise, and movement.](#) We celebrate the feminine emphasis on relationships, and at the same time value the temperate, logical approach that comes from a more masculine place.

This blend of masculine and feminine spiritual strengths together comprise what is known as *sod hai'bur*, the secret of the leap year. Literally, this means the secret of pregnancy.

Shenas Ha'ibbur

What happens in pregnancy? The Gemara, referring to the development of an unborn baby, says, *Mi yitneini k'yarchei kedem?* Who will bring us back to those days? A candle is lit over the head of the fetus, giving it clarity and purpose. It is protected, nurtured, enveloped in safety, comforted, and learns Torah with a malach.

The *shenas ha'ibbur* has the potential of bringing us back to that place. For this time period carries the power to return us to the era when sun and moon were in accord, when masculine and feminine strengths were joined together. [It can bring us to a state in which mashpia and mekabel switch places in an endless cycle of giving and receiving.](#)

We can birth this inside us by transcending a Yiddishkeit that is transactional, and embracing

a Yiddishkeit of relationship. Through the year, we may subconsciously expect our spiritual life to follow a specific pattern. [Our hearts make a bargain:](#) I'll do my bit, Hashem. I'll watch my tongue and make a beautiful Shabbos table and squeeze in a tefilla and cook a meal for someone sick. And in return... You'll keep my kids on the straight and narrow, keep all of us in relatively good health (a few bumps is okay, but not more than that), send us a decent and respectable livelihood....and on and on.

Our dreams and wishes are good, healthy, wholesome—and maybe even holy. But our loving Father wants us to come to an even deeper place. [A place where we may not know, and may understand even less, but still feel cradled in His arms.](#)

He wants us to become the children of Esther.

Not the End of the Story

The last words of the Megillah are chanted. *Shoshanas Yaakov* is sung. But so many of us women look around with a tug somewhere around our hearts. The story has ended, but closure eludes us. The decree was nullified, but Esther remains in the palace, married to Achashveirosh.

[This lack of closure runs through the ending of the Megillah.](#) Mordechai was feted by most of the people—but not by all. The second Beis Hamikdash was built—but those who witnessed it cried, so diminished was its luminance.

There's a reason for this. Esther in the palace

represents not only the hidden kochos of each woman, but the state of the Shechinah.

Esther, the *sifrei machshavah* tells us—*zu haShechinah*. Esther represents the energy of feminine, but on another level, Esther represents the Shechinah, that aspect of Hashem's feminine presence that dwells with us, **that is found in the depths of our hearts, no matter the darkness** that crouches outside the walls of our home, and that casts a shadow on our lives.

According to this we can understand the depth of why Esther was found in the palace of Achashveirosh. The Shechinah was in galus. **Part of hester panim is that within the depths of darkness and evil, even there the Shechinah is to be found.** Esther is found within the depravity and hatred of the Persian palace, and from there she works towards a geulah. It is in this place, the place that is furthest from the sanctity and purity of the Beis Hamikdash, that the future is born. Esther gives birth to Koresh, who initiates the building of the second Beis Hamikdash.

What has all this to do with us today?

Who has not felt herself in the palace of Achashveirosh? In a place of loneliness or pain or abandonment or sorrow? A place where the daily grind is so tough that we are worn out and weary or where the stone on our hearts is crushing. A place where it feels dangerous to hope, for that hope has been crushed so many

times. A place where we feel pursued by the demands of life and relationships that take so, so, so much work. **We are as Esther at the beginning of the Megillah, taken as strangers to a palace of foreign ideals and practices.** As Esther, we are left without words.

But the Megillah teaches us that we can be *megaleh*, reveal, the depths inside of us. As we search for the Esther that dwells inside the palace, we remind ourselves that we are also searching for the Shechinah that is in exile. Esther davened from a place of abandonment: Keili, Keili, lama azavtani, she cried out. My G-d, my G-d, why have you abandoned me? **But it was then, when her expectations and hopes and vision dissolved that she received the golden scepter.** It was when she gave herself up to the *ad delo yada*, to the not-knowing, that she discovered the Esther that would save klal Yisroel from genocide. Esther, the orphan girl, the girl without a home, found a home in Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

As Chodesh Adar Sheini enters and whirls through each and every one of us, my hope and prayer is that we tap into the possibility of reaching deep inside to find not only Esther's silence, but also Esther's prayer—and Esther's majesty. This Purim, my tefillah is that we all don a royal cloak and discover not only the feminine strengths that lie within—**but the harmonious marriage between masculine and feminine, mashpia and mekabel, the sun and the moon—klal Yisrael and Hakadosh Baruch Hu.**

Sincerely,

Mrs. Faigie Zelcer

