

# The Hidden Meaning

The Rambam in his *Moreh Nevuchim* (2:45) delineates eleven levels of prophecy. Each level directly parallels the level of perfection achieved by the prophet or holy person. In other words, the greater the prophet, the greater his/her ability to speak the word of God. For example, the first and lowest level of Divine inspiration described by Rambam is when one speaks with the “the spirit of God” (*Ruach Elokim*), and culminates with Moshe Rabbeinu’s level, which in terms of transmission and clarity is a qualitatively different type of prophecy than that of all of prophets.

Rambam goes on to explain that each of the three sections of Tanakh was written with hierarchical levels of Divine inspiration. The Torah, being the direct word of God, was written with the highest level; the Prophetic (Navi) books were written with a lower level of prophecy; and finally the books of K’suvim (Writings) with an even lower level of Divine inspiration. The inclusion of Megillas Esther within Tanakh shows that Chazal deemed it to be written with a level of Divine inspiration.

Although Esther is listed as one of the seven prophetesses, the Gemara, in *Tractate Megilla* 7a, retells the story of Esther’s failed attempt and eventual success to include Megillas Esther within Tanakh. The Gemara there details the argument among the early Sages as to which verse in Megillas Esther proves that it was written with Divine inspiration:



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תניא, רבי אליעזר אומר: אסתר ברוח הקודש נאמרה, שנאמרה ויאמר המן בלבן. רבי עקיבא אומר: אסתר ברוח הקודש נאמרה, שנאמר ותהי אסתר נשאת חן בעיני כל רואיה. רבי מאיר אומר: אסתר ברוח הקודש נאמרה, שנאמר ויודע הדבר למרדכי. רבי יוסי בן דורמסקית אומר: אסתר ברוח הקודש נאמרה, שנאמר ובבזה לא שלחו את ידם. אמר שמואל: אי הואי התם הוה אמינא מלתא דעדיפא מכולהו, שנאמר קימו וקבלו — קימו למעלה מה שקיבלו למטה.

*Better than all these sources is “they fulfilled and accepted” — they fulfilled in Heaven what they accepted below.*

The Gemara explains why each opinion has a flaw until we arrive at Shmuel’s proof. For example, R. Akiva assumed that no human could have written that everyone found Esther attractive, as how could one person possibly know that? So, it must be that Megillas Esther was Divinely inspired. However, one could make the case that everyone found beauty in her because she appeared to each as though she was a native of the onlooker’s country. So we need not invoke a Divine perspective to explain the verse.

Eventually, the Talmud accepts the last proof suggested by the Amora Shmuel. But since the Talmud knew that the last opinion had no flaw, what did the Talmud gain by recording four Tannaitic opinions that are rejected one after another? There must be something we can learn from those four proofs even if they are rejected.

Before we read the Megillah on Purim night, we make the blessing *al mikrah megillah*, without noting which Megillah we are reading. One would have thought that the blessing should be “*al mikra Megillas Esther.*” It appears that the blessing itself is hinting at a deeper notion of the word



*R. Eliezer said: Megillas Esther was written with Ru’ach ha-Kodesh. We learn this from “Haman said in his heart (the king wants to honor me)”;* R. Akiva says, *we learn this from “Esther bore grace in the eyes of all who saw her.”* R. Meir learns this from “*The matter became known to Mordechai.*” R. Yosi ben Dormaskis learns this from “*They did not take from the spoils.*” Shmuel:

“megilla.” Since God’s hand remains hidden in the natural world, and yet is intertwined within the natural course of events, it’s easy to go through life and not recognize His directing hand in our everyday lives. Megillas Esther is therefore called “the megillah,” as the very nature of the book is to *megaleh* (to reveal) the hidden. So while the word “megillah” usually only refers to the fact that a book is a scroll, by Megillas Esther, it is called “the megillah,” hinting at the fact that it is the ideal type of megillah: one that lives up to the literal sense of the word and to its exposition.

Indeed, Megillas Esther is the book that leaves us with the final lesson for living in exile, namely that God

is directing our everyday lives even if we do not always feel that way. God’s directing hand can be found in the narrative throughout the storyline of the Megillah, which is demonstrated through the verses the Tanna’im mention in the Gemara. Each Tanna focuses on a different character or

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scene that could be glanced over without recognizing its significance. Whether it was Esther, Mordechai or Haman: each of their thoughts and actions were part of the grand scheme of events unfolding in the Megillah. This understanding gives us a deeper insight into why the Talmud records the various rejected opinions of the Tanna’im. Keeping in mind the goals of the Megillah, it’s important to read through the entire story and see that God is directing each move, step and thought. We should not only appreciate that Hashem saves the Jewish people and turning the whole story around, but we should go through each verse and try to see God’s Divine intervention in each event.

A number of commentaries ask: The Gemara’s discussion about whether Esther was written with Divine inspiration is really about whether the book itself was a Divinely ordained book or whether it was a personal recollection of the events. Nobody ever questioned whether Mordechai and Esther were prophets. Why then does the Gemara prove that the book was Divinely ordained from various verses that prove that they knew things that only those with prophecy could have known? How does this prove that the book itself was Divinely ordained and not personal recollections of the events that also include a recollection of their prophetic visions? R. Yehonatan Eibeschutz, *Ye’arot Devash* 2:2, suggests that Mordechai and Esther were very humble people. If they were writing a book of personal recollections, they would not have included parts that hint to their being prophets. The only explanation for including these hints is because the book itself was Divinely ordained and they were not given the choice as to whether to include these hints.

**Torah To Go Editors**

