פרק א

א:א

וַיְהִי בִּימֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הַמֹּלֵךְ
מֵהֹדּוּ וְעַד כּוּשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה׃

The "first" of something is always an introduction for what follows. This is certainly true of the first *pasuk* in the Torah and even the first word of *Sefer Bereishis*. It is like a seed or DNA that contains within it all its future potential. The first *pasuk* of the Megillah, וַיְהִי בִּימֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, *It was in the days of Achashveirosh*, introduces us to one of the main characters of the Purim story. It says in *Pirkei Avos* that there is no man who does not have a time when he is successful.[1] We also learn from the Gemara to be wary of an evil person who is on a winning streak.[2] In the Megillah, we find that King Achashveirosh achieved success (and the same later applied to Haman and then switched to Mordechai and Esther), and the first *pasuk* shows that this success came in stages.

The Gemara in *Megillah* explains that when the *pasuk* says וַיְהִי בִּימֵי, *It was in the days of*, it is always an expression of *tzaar*, sorrow.[3] The sorrow here is הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, which *Rashi* explains as *he was the same*

1 *Pirkei Avos* 4:3.

2 See *Megillah* 6b, which says that when an evil person is successful, one should not openly oppose him.

3 *Megillah* 10b.

Achashveirosh from beginning to end. He was a constant pursuer of wealth,[4] honor, and fame.

הַמּוֹלֵךְ, *He reigned*, i.e., he became king by buying this position with his wealth. It started by him becoming king over one country. He then extended this to becoming king over another province, מֵהֹדּוּ וְעַד כּוּשׁ, *from Hodu to Kush*, two provinces next to each other. This then expanded to שֶׁבַע, *seven* provinces, וְעֶשְׂרִים, another *twenty*, and then, וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה, a further *one hundred*,[5] making him a king over the whole world.[6]

א:ב

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם כְּשֶׁבֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
עַל כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה׃

All these happenings took place **בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם** כְּשֶׁבֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ עַל כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ, ***in those days**, when King Achashveirosh sat on the throne of his kingdom*, as Chazal say, "מי שיש לו מנה רוצה מאתים—Someone who has one hundred *zuz* wants to have two hundred,"[7] i.e., to double what he has. Similarly, "אוהב כסף לא ישבע כסף—Someone who loves money will never be satisfied"[8] and will always pursue more money. Achashveirosh had money and wanted to invest it in something that would provide dividends. He did this by pursuing more honor and fame by building a duplicate of Shlomo Hamelech's throne.[9] Thus, it was in those days when the throne had been completed, and he was finally able to sit on it.

4 See 10:1 below, and the commentary there, that once Achashveirosh knew Esther's nation, he reimposed taxes on the countries to attain more money.

5 This explains why the order of the numbers is from smallest to largest—seven, twenty, and one hundred—as opposed to the beginning of *Parashas Chayei Sarah* (*Bereishis* 23:1), where the *pasuk* says that Sarah lived one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years, i.e., the same numbers in reverse. Here in the Megillah, the numbers represent a build-up, while in *Chayei Sarah* they are reflecting backward on the different stages of Sarah's life.

6 *Megillah* 11a.

7 Based on *Koheles Rabbah* 1:13.

8 *Koheles* 5:9.

9 *Targum Sheini*. He did not dare try to ascend Shlomo's real throne because Pharaoh had tried doing so and been kicked by the lion, becoming lame as a result. This earned him his name *Paro Necho*, Pharaoh the Lame.

אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה, *which was in Shushan the capital*. The building of this throne began in Shushan, the capital city, either because it was where the materials were available or because it was where the workmen resided, and upon completion it was meant to be moved to the long-established capital in Bavel. However, when the throne could not be moved,[10] Achashveirosh wanted the throne so much that he moved the years-old capital to Shushan, all in order to show off that he was sitting on such an impressive throne. Alternatively, feeling on a high from his successes, the king chose voluntarily to change the location of his capital with the idea of "שינוי מקום שינוי מזל—A change in place can change the *mazal*,"[11] in hope of surpassing even his current successes.

א:ג

בִּשְׁנַת שָׁלוֹשׁ לְמָלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֶּה לְכָל שָׂרָיו וַעֲבָדָיו חֵיל פָּרַס וּמָדַי הַפַּרְתְּמִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינוֹת לְפָנָיו:

Three years later, בִּשְׁנַת שָׁלוֹשׁ לְמָלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֶּה, *in the third year of his reign, he made a feast*, having enjoyed three successful years as king with no problems. The number three represents a *chazakah*, something that is established that we assume will continue. Achashveirosh started off with a lavish feast for those close to him in positions of power and who worked in the palace, לְכָל שָׂרָיו וַעֲבָדָיו חֵיל פָּרַס וּמָדַי הַפַּרְתְּמִים, *for all his princes and his servants, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles*, thereby expressing his appreciation for their loyalty.

וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינוֹת לְפָנָיו, *And the princes of the provinces* who were *before him*. Who were these people? *Rashi* in *Melachim I* explains that these were

10 Achashveirosh commissioned a team of Egyptian engineers to build an exact replica of the magnificent throne of Shlomo Hamelech, but once it was completed in Shushan, it was too heavy to physically move it to his original capital in Babylon. The *Vilna Gaon* explains that this was part of Hashem's plan, as it forced Achashveirosh to relocate his government to Shushan, the same city as Mordechai and Esther, setting the stage for the Purim miracle.

11 See *Rosh Hashanah* 16b, "And some say: Also, a change of one's place of residence cancels an evil judgment."

princes from all the other countries who were taken captive to the ruling king as guarantors so that the other countries would not rebel.[12]

א:ד

בְּהַרְאֹתוֹ אֶת עֹשֶׁר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת יְקָר תִּפְאֶרֶת
גְּדוּלָּתוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים שְׁמוֹנִים וּמְאַת יוֹם׃

There are six expressions in this *pasuk* that refer to Achashveirosh's great wealth, בְּהַרְאֹתוֹ אֶת **עֹשֶׁר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ** וְאֶת **יְקָר תִּפְאֶרֶת גְּדוּלָּתוֹ**, *when he showed the* ***riches*** *of his* ***glorious kingdom*** *and the* ***splendor*** *of his* ***excellent majesty***. Perhaps we can suggest that each of the six months of feasting paralleled one expression of wealth. Again, the purpose of the יָמִים רַבִּים שְׁמוֹנִים וּמְאַת יוֹם, *many days, one hundred and eighty days* was to show off his wealth to many others; he therefore made the feast last long enough to enable people from far away to travel and still be able to participate. One hundred and eighty days is almost half a year, made up of six months consisting of thirty days. The Megillah does not say when exactly in the year he made the feast for everyone, but presumably it was in the summer months when people could travel. This might also explain why Achashveirosh only held the feast for this amount of time—a half year in the summer months—as during the rest of the year, in the winter months, it would be harder for people to travel. The extra words, יָמִים רַבִּים, *many days*, are superfluous since the *pasuk* clearly describes the length as one hundred and eighty days. The additional words show that there were literally "many days," meaning that each day was uniquely extravagant and included a different display of wealth and an original menu—and there were *many* of these unique days.

12 *Melachim I* 2:14.

א:ה

וּבִמְלוֹאת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל הָעָם
הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד קָטָן
מִשְׁתֶּה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּחֲצַר גִּנַּת בִּיתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ׃

וּבִמְלוֹאת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה, *And when these days were over*. The word מלא means "filled," and the emphasis here is that this new feast was not a replacement for the 180-day feast, as this one would only start when the other one was "full,"[13] by showing off to the whole world and impressing all the people.

עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל הָעָם הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה, *The king made* a feast *for all the people present in Shushan the capital*. King Achashveirosh wanted to impress the locals in Shushan Habirah, the capital city of the king, to guarantee that they would remain forever in awe of him. The intention was to make a statement לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד קָטָן, *from old until young*. This started with inviting the parents and making a powerful impression on them so they would then be willing to bring their children, too. Also, since people of different ages enjoy different types of foods, Achachveirosh made sure a variety of foods was served so the party would be enjoyed and remembered by old and young alike.

King Achashveirosh arranged a מִשְׁתֶּה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, *feast for seven days*, an exclusive party just for the people of Shushan, one for each day of the week. Presumably this involved a different menu each day so that the guests would remember that day's party by the specific food they had eaten. Additionally, by holding the feast for seven days, Achashveirosh ensured that one of the days would be Shabbos: he wanted the Jewish People to choose the meal he was serving over the usual Shabbos meal they would have at home.[14]

13 See a similar idea in *Rashi* on *Divrei Hayamim I* 17:11, that Shlomo only became king after the days of King David were "full."

14 See *Megillah* 12b, which compares the difference in activities, atmosphere, and discussion that take place at the meals of non-Jews compared to the Shabbos meals of the Jewish People. The Jewish People have Torah discussions, eat, drink, and praise Hashem, while the non-Jews feast to their hearts' content, and the discussion can turn to lewd content, as happened here. A similar idea is brought in *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 76:14 when explaining why we say the *pasuk*

In addition to showing off, he wanted to show the people how much he valued them, so he enabled them to get an inside view בַּחֲצַר גִּנַּת בִּיתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ, *in the courtyard, garden of the king's palace*, a view of his private castle and its grounds. This was his attempt to show his subjects he liked them and to secure their loyalty.

א:ו

חוּר כַּרְפַּס וּתְכֵלֶת אָחוּז בְּחַבְלֵי בוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן
עַל גְּלִילֵי כֶסֶף וְעַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ מִטּוֹת זָהָב וָכֶסֶף
עַל רִצְפַת בַּהַט וָשֵׁשׁ וְדַר וְסֹחָרֶת׃

There were spreads of *white, fine cotton, and blue, embroidered with cords of linen and purple, on silver rods and marble columns, couches of gold and silver, on a pavement of green, white, shell, and onyx marble*. King Achashveirosh showed off a tremendous amount of wealth: not only a few items but demonstrations of wealth from all around the palace, both on the furnishings and on the ceilings and floors and in between, and not just one type of wealth but many different expensive items.

א:ז

וְהַשְׁקוֹת בִּכְלֵי זָהָב וְכֵלִים מִכֵּלִים שׁוֹנִים
וְיֵין מַלְכוּת רָב כְּיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ׃

וְהַשְׁקוֹת בִּכְלֵי זָהָב וְכֵלִים מִכֵּלִים שׁוֹנִים, *And they gave them to drink in golden vessels, and the vessels differed from one another*. Achashveirosh wanted to give the people the whole experience, from the cup, the container, until the wine, the contents. Hence, he gave them the wine in gold cups from a variety of old and special wines usually reserved solely for the king. Some say he gave each person wine that was their age or even older. Perhaps the wines were superior in that they were purer, taken only from

"ואני תפלתי לך ה' עת רצון—But, as for me, may my prayer to You, Hashem, be in an acceptable time" (*Tehillim* 69:14). Hashem compares our behavior of eating our meal on Shabbos and then going to *Minchah* to the behavior of the nations of the world, and we are pleasing to Him.

the first drop of the ripest grapes without impurities.[15] Unlike other foods and drinks, wine gets better with age. Additionally, the cups themselves were made of different types of gold[16] and of different designs.

וְיֵין מַלְכוּת רָב כְּיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ, *And royal wine was plentiful according to the bounty of the king*. Not only did King Achashveirosh show off with the expensive display of his great wealth, but he also wanted the people to partake in the types of delicacies and expensive food and drink that he himself, as the king, ate and drank.[17] Since he invited them to a משתה, feast, which is from the *lashon* of שתיה, drink, the focus of the event was the drinking, not the food. This meant that while, as befits a king, there was plenty of food,[18] more drinking options were offered than food options. There was more in both quality and quantity.

א:ח

וְהַשְּׁתִיָּה כַּדָּת אֵין אֹנֵס כִּי כֵן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ
עַל כָּל רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹן אִישׁ וָאִישׁ׃

וְהַשְּׁתִיָּה כַּדָּת אֵין אֹנֵס, *And the drinking was according to the law* with *no one forcing*. Usually such a wine party involved people forcing guests to drink the entire contents of their cup. Therefore, here the king had to issue a special proclamation that this law did not apply to these feasts. The command, כִּי כֵן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ, *for so had the king established*, was issued not

15 See *Rashi* on *Shemos* 27:20, where we find this idea in relation to the olives used for making oil for the *Menorah*.

16 *Yoma* 44b–45a states that there are seven types (or grades) of gold.

17 See *Sanhedrin* 70a, where Rav Chanan says that wine was created in this world either for the Jewish People to comfort mourners or to give enjoyment to the wicked so they receive reward for their good actions in this world. Thus, the *mishteh* was for the gentiles to enjoy their reward in this world, which is why they would often have such feasts (and thereby use up the good deeds they had accumulated).

18 The rule that the word *mishteh* refers to a feast of drinking is generally true when it comes to non-Jews. The Gemara in *Megillah* 12a says that since this feast involved the Jews, whose feasts usually involved more food than drink, the king made an exception and adapted it to provide more food than usual.
Unusually, the feast here had more food than drink, resembling the meals of the Jewish People. This was perhaps in order to lure the Jewish People to come and participate.

only to the overseer but to each waiter who oversaw each area, עַל כָּל רַב בֵּיתוֹ, *upon every steward of his house*, obligating them לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹן אִישׁ וָאִישׁ, *to do according to every man's wish*, whatever the people wanted, without force, willingly. Included in this was the prohibition against the usual custom of trying to convince and encourage others to drink more in order that they should feel more relaxed.

א:ט

גַּם וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֵּה נָשִׁים
בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ:

גַּם וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֵּה נָשִׁים, *Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women*. The feast with wine was predominantly for the men, and run by the king himself. What about the women? Queen Vashti made a special feast for the women. This meant liquors and drinks usually drunk by women, rather than wine. The purpose of the wine was to impress them so they would remain loyal to the king. This is why it took place בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, *in the royal house of King Achashveirosh*, in the king's palace. Vashti was not trying to compete with the king but to complement his party by catering to the ladies.[19]

א:י

בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כְּטוֹב לֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיָּיִן אָמַר לִמְהוּמָן
בִּזְתָא חַרְבוֹנָא בִּגְתָא וַאֲבַגְתָא זֵתַר וְכַרְכַּס שִׁבְעַת
הַסָּרִיסִים הַמְשָׁרְתִים אֶת פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ:

בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, *On the seventh day*. This was the last day of the seven-day feast, the climax. It also meant it was כְּטוֹב לֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיָּיִן, *when the king's heart was merry with wine*. He was more intoxicated as a result of the build-up of many days of wine, as well as very happy at seeing how

19 See the Gemara at the end of *Megillah* 12a, which says that the intention of both Achashveirosh and Vashti was for the drunken parties to lead to sin.

everything had gone according to plan. He therefore mistakenly acted without thinking things through properly.[20]

The Gemara says that one's true character becomes apparent in a state of drunkenness.[21] The king did not pick his ordinary servants or attendants to bring Vashti; rather, אָמַר לִמְהוּמָן בִּזְתָא חַרְבוֹנָא בִּגְתָא וַאֲבַגְתָא, זֵתַר וְכַרְכַּס שִׁבְעַת **הַסָּרִיסִים**[22] **הַמְשָׁרְתִים אֶת פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ**, *he said to Mehuman, Biz'sa, Charvona, Bigsa, and Avagsa, Zesar, and Charkas, the seven **chamberlains who ministered in the presence of King Achashveirosh***. He asked very high-up officials from among his inner circle, and not just one of them but שִׁבְעַת הַסָּרִיסִים, *the seven chamberlains*, all seven of them. This made the matter very public and high profile, as he wanted to show off—which is one of the stages of getting drunk.[23] However, this meant that Vashti's refusal to heed their advice would be extremely damaging to the impression that Achashveirosh was aiming to project to the masses about his authority.

שִׁבְעַת הַסָּרִיסִים הַמְשָׁרְתִים אֶת פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, *The **seven** chamberlains who ministered in the presence of King Achashveirosh*. The Gemara in *Sotah* relates that Pharaoh had three advisors, like a small *beis din* of three, where one could decide guilty, one could decide innocent, and the third

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20 This is why in halachah, a *rav* cannot *pasken* new (not simple) questions after drinking even a *reviis*, which is a relatively small amount of wine. See *Eiruvin* 64a.

21 *Eiruvin* 65b says, "אדם ניכר בכיסו **בכוסו** ובכעסו—A person's inner personality is seen through how they spend money, how they act when they are **drunk**, and when they get angry."

22 See *Sanhedrin* 93b, which brings two explanations for why ministers are called *sarisim*. *Rashi* explains that it is because they are castrated (*saris*) so that they will not get married and will thereby be totally dedicated to the services of the king.

23 *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Noach* 61, s.v. "ויטע כרם—And he planted a vine," brings a fascinating reason behind the different stages of getting drunk: "ויטע כרם בא לקראתו השטן א"ל רצונך שנטענה יחדו אני ואתה א"ל הן מיד הביא תחלה רחלה אחת ושחטה על הגפן ואחר כך הביא אריה אחד ושחטו על אותו הגפן ואחר כך חזיר אחד ושחטו על אותו הגפן. מפני מה עשה כן השטן כשאדם שותה כוס אחד הוא כרחלה עניו ושפל רוח **וכשהוא שותה שתי כוסות מיד נעשה גבור כארי ומתחיל לדבר גדולות ואומר מי כמוני**. וכשהוא שותה ג' או ד' מיד הוא נעשה כחזיר שמתלכלך בטיט ורפש אף הוא מתלכלך ואף במי רגלים." The Satan made a partnership with Noach in the growing of the vine tree, the only one saved and taken into the ark and now planted. He first brought a sheep and slaughtered it so that its blood fertilized the ground. He then did the same with a lion and pig. This had an impact on the grapes produced, as seen in the stages a person goes through as they drink more and more wine. First, they become sheepish and shy, **then they become loud and boastful like a lion**, and then they vomit and roll around in the dirt like a pig."

would break the tie, making a majority.[24] Why, then, did Achashveirosh have seven advisors? The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* describes how a leap year is determined: The process starts with three judges who decide if there should be a leap year. If the majority say yes, the matter is then discussed between five judges. If a majority say yes, it is discussed between seven judges, and the final decision rests upon what the majority decide.[25] Perhaps, according to this, the seven were the full set of advisors, three of whom would generally decide on an easy issue and five of whom would rule on a more difficult issue. Alternatively, the larger the number of such high-ranking people involved in a mission, the greater the importance attached to that particular mission. Hence, in this mission, which was so important, all seven were enlisted.

א:יא

לְהָבִיא אֶת וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת
לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת יָפְיָהּ כִּי טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה הִיא׃

To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was of beautiful appearance. In his intoxication, he asked to bring her in a non-*tz'nius* state to show off her external beauty. The Gemara in *Megillah* says that she was one of the four most beautiful women in history.[26] Achachveirosh wanted to show her off because non-Jews who only believe in the physical world only focus on and value physicality, externality, and the pleasures of the human body.

24 *Sotah* 11a.
25 *Sanhedrin* 10b.
26 *Megillah* 15a.

א:י״ב

וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד
הַסָּרִיסִים וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד וַחֲמָתוֹ בָּעֲרָה בוֹ׃

Vashti herself was not drunk, so she thought through the king's demand logically. She considered how such an action would show a lack of *kevod ha'malchus*, honor to the kingdom, although the Gemara in *Megillah* implies that on a personal level she would have been willing to do it.[27] However, as a queen and a role model for the people, she knew it would be the wrong thing to do; hence וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא, *Queen Vashti refused to come*.

Not only did she refuse the king, בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ, *at the king's word*, but she also declined to follow instructions given by important messengers from the king's inner circle, אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים, *which was* brought *by the hand of the chamberlains*. This resulted in two types of anger: וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ **מְאֹד**, *the king became **very** angry*—this was outward anger at her on behalf of all the seven messengers; וַחֲמָתוֹ בָּעֲרָה **בוֹ**, *and his anger burned **within him***—this was an inner anger at her for going against him as her husband. The Gemara in *Megillah* says his anger was also a reaction to the hurtful personal insults she threw at him about him acting as royalty while he lacked royal lineage; he did not want to outwardly respond to these and thereby corroborate them.[28]

א:י״ג

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יֹדְעֵי הָעִתִּים כִּי כֵן
דִּבֶּר הַמֶּלֶךְ לִפְנֵי כָּל יֹדְעֵי דָּת וָדִין׃

The king was in a quandary. On the one hand, the queen had publicly gone against him, the king, who publicly represented the country, and it was therefore an affront to the entire country. On the other hand, on a personal basis, as a husband to his wife, he could grant her forgiveness.

27 Ibid., 12a.
28 Ibid., 12b.

Therefore, וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יֹדְעֵי הָעִתִּים כִּי כֵן דִּבֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לִפְנֵי כָּל יֹדְעֵי דָּת וְדִין, *the king said to the wise men who knew the times, for so was the king's word*, to present the case *before all who knew law and judgment*. He went not to his ordinary advisors, but to wise men who could take all matters into consideration. They would not necessarily rule according to the strict letter of the law but would also bear in mind the clause allowing for a *horas shaah*, an exceptional law for that particular time, also taking the king's personal feelings into account and allowing for an override.

א:יד

וְהַקָּרֹב אֵלָיו כַּרְשְׁנָא שֵׁתָר אַדְמָתָא תַּרְשִׁישׁ
מֶרֶס מַרְסְנָא מְמוּכָן שִׁבְעַת שָׂרֵי פָּרַס וּמָדַי
רֹאֵי פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַיֹּשְׁבִים רִאשֹׁנָה בַּמַּלְכוּת:

Again, there were seven judges to this court. These were not random people; rather, the king specifically handpicked people who liked him and he felt close to,וְהַקָּרֹב אֵלָיו כַּרְשְׁנָא שֵׁתָר אַדְמָתָא תַּרְשִׁישׁ מֶרֶס מַרְסְנָא מְמוּכָן שִׁבְעַת שָׂרֵי פָּרַס וּמָדַי, *and the **nearest** to him were Carshena, Shesar, Admasa, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memuchan, the seven princes of Persia and Media*. He knew they would decide according to whatever the king hinted was the outcome he desired. They were רֹאֵי פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, *those who saw the king's face*, present and often seen by the king. They therefore were also given the privilege of being הַיֹּשְׁבִים רִאשֹׁנָה בַּמַּלְכוּת, *those who sat first in the kingdom*, the primary and closest advisors of the king.

א:טו

כְּדָת מַה לַּעֲשׂוֹת בַּמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָשְׂתָה
אֶת מַאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים:

They were charged with adjudicating a unique case never before encountered in their history: כְּדָת מַה לַּעֲשׂוֹת בַּמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי, *according to the law, what shall be done to Queen Vashti*, how should she be judged at her trial? The two charges against her were עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָשְׂתָה אֶת מַאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ,

that she did not comply with the order of the king, and that she refused the orders brought בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים, *by the hand of the chamberlains*, the high officials who were the messengers.

א:טז

וַיֹּאמֶר מְמוּכָן לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים לֹא עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ
לְבַדּוֹ עָוְתָה וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה כִּי עַל כָּל הַשָּׂרִים וְעַל
כָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ׃

Before they had a chance to discuss it in depth, וַיֹּאמֶר מְמוּכָן לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים, *Memuchan spoke before the king and the princes*. Memuchan was the youngest and lowest of all seven, as seen by the order of names, where he comes last.[29] Being relatively new, he did not know the protocol of sensing what the king wanted and issuing a ruling accordingly. He therefore stated his opinion aloud, delivering a knockout blow to the king's hopes of saving Vashti. He says, לֹא עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עָוְתָה וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה, *Not against the king alone has Vashti the queen done wrong*, i.e., there is no longer any place for personal considerations, as it is now a national matter that involves not only the king, כִּי עַל כָּל הַשָּׂרִים וְעַל כָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, *but against all the princes and all the peoples that are in all King Achashveirosh's provinces*; it has ripple effects on all the people. The king and queen are role models, and as such, all their actions are analyzed and imitated.[30]

29 *Esther* 1:14.

30 This is true for all people in positions of power and authority, and it is their responsibility to bear this in mind and act accordingly. The same is true for the Jewish People, who should make sure to always act correctly in public, making a *kiddush Hashem* and not the opposite, as we are all the ambassadors of Hashem.

א:יז

כִּי יֵצֵא דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה עַל כָּל הַנָּשִׁים לְהַבְזוֹת
בַּעְלֵיהֶן בְּעֵינֵיהֶן בְּאָמְרָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אָמַר
לְהָבִיא אֶת וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לְפָנָיו וְלֹא בָאָה:

Memuchan continues: Do not push aside this consideration and say its effect is minimal,כִּי יֵצֵא דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה **עַל כָּל הַנָּשִׁים** לְהַבְזוֹת בַּעְלֵיהֶן בְּעֵינֵיהֶן, *for the word of the queen will spread to **all the women**, to make them despise their husbands in their eyes*, בְּאָמְרָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אָמַר לְהָבִיא אֶת וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה, *when they say, "King Achashveirosh ordered to bring Vashti the queen before him, but she did not come."* The message will be taken by all women to follow suit and act similarly against their husbands—not only in secrecy, behind his back, and at home, but even **בְּעֵינֵיהֶן** לְהַבְזוֹת בַּעְלֵיהֶן, *to make them despise their husbands **in their eyes***, in front of them, and even in public, with a level of brazenness.

א:יח

וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמַרְנָה שָׂרוֹת פָּרַס וּמָדַי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ
אֶת דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה לְכֹל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּכְדֵי בִזָּיוֹן וָקָצֶף:

This effect will not only be felt among the general populace but also in the higher-class circles of the nobles: וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמַרְנָה שָׂרוֹת פָּרַס וּמָדַי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה, *And this day, the princesses of Persia and Media who heard the word of the queen, when they say* this **לְכֹל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ**, ***to all the princes of the king***, there will be וּכְדֵי בִזָּיוֹן וָקָצֶף, *much disgrace and anger*. It will cause an even greater disgrace to the king if he does not nip it in the bud immediately by ordering a severe punishment for such behavior. Memuchan is saying that the king must have a policy of zero tolerance that will be seen and felt by all the people—from the nobles to the commoners.

א:יט

אִם עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יֵצֵא דְבַר מַלְכוּת מִלְּפָנָיו וְיִכָּתֵב בְּדָתֵי
פָרַס וּמָדַי וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא תָבוֹא וַשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ וּמַלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ לִרְעוּתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה מִמֶּנָּה:

אִם עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב, *If it pleases the king*. This phrase appears several times in the Megillah, and its implication is that if the king wants to act directly according to the law, יֵצֵא **דְבַר מַלְכוּת** מִלְּפָנָיו, *let a **royal law** go forth from before him*. Words alone in the form of a speech from the king are not sufficient; for it to be effective, it must be a law issued by the king. In addition, not only does the undesirable act need to be publicly punished and protested, but it also needs stricter guidelines.[31] וְיִכָּתֵב בְּדָתֵי פָרַס וּמָדַי וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר, *And let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media and let it not be revoked*, in order to prevent any future reoccurrence, אֲשֶׁר לֹא תָבוֹא וַשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, *that Vashti shall not come before King Achashveirosh*, that the queen refused the command of the king. As the severe punishment, וּמַלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ לִרְעוּתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה מִמֶּנָּה, *let the king give her royal position to her peer who is better than her*, i.e., she was to lose the role of queen. However, that alone would not be enough of a punishment; the real punishment would be felt when her position would be given away to a replacement, as this would show Vashti that she could never reclaim it. So long as there was no replacement, she could still imagine that she might get reinstated, but once replaced, she would know it was no longer a possibility.

א:כ

וְנִשְׁמַע פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל מַלְכוּתוֹ כִּי רַבָּה
הִיא וְכָל הַנָּשִׁים יִתְּנוּ יְקָר לְבַעְלֵיהֶן לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד קָטָן:

וְנִשְׁמַע פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל מַלְכוּתוֹ, *And let the verdict of the king be heard throughout his entire kingdom*. Whatever happened in the palace was

31 As it says in the first Mishnah in *Pirkei Avos* (1:1): "וַעֲשׂוּ סְיָג לַתּוֹרָה—Make additional fences to protect the Torah." See *Sanhedrin* 46a for examples of how the Chachamim gave disproportionate punishments to certain acts to deter others from imitating those acts.

the model for everywhere else in the kingdom. Hence, when a change was made there, it needed to be publicized everywhere else, כִּי רַבָּה הִיא, *because it is great*, i.e., this change was a big deal.

The intention of this decree was to return the power in the house more forcefully to the husband, giving him full authority over his wife. This would apply on all levels of society: וְכָל הַנָּשִׁים יִתְּנוּ יְקָר לְבַעְלֵיהֶן, *and* ***all the women*** *shall give honor to their husbands*, not only among the nobles, like the king, where things had gone awry, but also among the local populace. לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד קָטָן, *From old to young*, whether the wife was older or younger than her husband, the husband was still to be in charge.

א:כא

וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים
וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּדְבַר מְמוּכָן:

וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, *And the matter was pleasing in the eyes of the king*, because he had to take action in order to reinstate the people's confidence in his power, and וְהַשָּׂרִים [...בְּעֵינֵי], in the eyes of *the princes*, because *their* advice had been taken, and the king stood up for *their* honor when the queen had refused *their* message. Based on all this, the decision was made and followed through with: וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּדְבַר מְמוּכָן, *And the king did according to the word of Memuchan*. The credit for the good or bad of this decree was traced to Memuchan.

א:כב

וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל מְדִינָה
וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָבָהּ וְאֶל עַם וָעָם כִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ לִהְיוֹת
כָּל אִישׁ שֹׂרֵר בְּבֵיתוֹ וּמְדַבֵּר כִּלְשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ:

The king needed to publicize this decision and the new decrees to all the people. This was a significant job, as it could not simply involve one letter bring written and handed out. וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ, *And he sent letters to all the king's provinces*, many of which were far away, אֶל מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָבָהּ וְאֶל עַם וָעָם כִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ, *to every province according to its*

script, and to every nationality according to its language, in many different languages to many different nations. By going to all this effort, the king was showing the importance of this message—לִהְיוֹת כָּל אִישׁ שׂוֵר בְּבֵיתוֹ, *that every man dominate in his household*, that every man should be the decision maker in the home, וּמְדַבֵּר כִּלְשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ, *and speak according to the language of his nationality*, to the extent that the husband's language would be the language spoken in the house.