YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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LITERARY STUDY OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

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**Lecture #28:**

**The Presentation of Facts in the Narrative, Part III**

In our previous lecture, we observed the hidden readings alluded to by chronological shifts in the narrative, flashbacks, and forward leaps. In this lecture, we will examine other ways in which the narrator, despite maintaining a linear narrative, transmits messages through the presentation and ordering of facts.

**NARRATOR’S INTERJECTIONS: THE “INNOCENT” STYLE**

Let us open our current discussion at the point with which we concluded the previous lecture — the narrator’s breaking into the narrative (sometimes described as the “imposing narrator”). These interjections are often expressed innocently; the verse does not say anything explicitly, but only tries to give over some fact or another to the reader “by the way,” as it were. Nevertheless, the practical effect of this casual disingenuousness, with the help of the location in which the detail is inserted, is to present a hidden meaning of the events. We will demonstrate an interjection such as this with the description of the complaint of the *Mitavim,* those who desired meat in the desert (*Bamidbar*, chapter 11). The Israelites’ complaint is described in the following way (vv. 4-6):

And the rabble in their midst had a great desire, and the Israelites came back and cried; they said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost, as well as the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic. But now our soul is dry; there is nothing for our eyes but the manna!”

Criticism of the *Mitavim* is already clear at the beginning of the complaint; the verse describes this complaint as stemming from the desire of “the rabble in their midst,” and the Israelites either join or are dragged into (“they came back”) this complaint.[[1]](#footnote-1) The irony with which the *Mitavim* are presented is clear in the gap between the content of their request and their recollection of Egypt: they ask for meat, but by their own admission, there was no meat in Egypt, but only fish and vegetables. Moreover, the reference to “at no cost” for a nation enslaved in Egypt is obviously a somewhat bizarre turn of phrase. The irony continues through the detailed list of the menu that the Israelites were offered in Egypt. The very length of the list (noticeable because of the anaphora of the word “*et*” before each of the items) gives the feeling of an exaggerated restaurant menu. Indeed, the content is very surprising; one may very well yearn to eat fish, cucumbers, and melons, but are the *Mitavim* truly longing for leeks as well?! In any case, compared to the cornucopia given to them in Egypt “at no cost,” the manna is a poor substitute, which causes the *Mitavim* to feel they have lost their appetite — literally, “our soul is dry.” They are bored by collecting the monotonous manna each day.

At this stage of the story, between the complaint of the *Mitavim* and the response of Moshe, the narrator bursts in and spends a few moments describing the characteristics of the manna (vv. 7-9):

The manna was like coriander seed and its appearance was crystalline. The people went about and gathered, and then they ground it in a mill or crushed it in a mortar, cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes; it tasted like something made with olive oil. When the dew came down on the camp at night, the manna came down on it.

In this interjection, the verse alludes to the reader that there is no substance to the Israelites’ complaint. These things are not said explicitly, but they arise from the “innocent” description of the manna, as Rashi points out (ad loc., v. 7):

“The manna was like coriander seed” — the one who said this did not say this. The Israelites say, “There is nothing for our eyes but the manna”, but God writes in the Torah, “The manna was like coriander seed…,” as if to say, “Look, people of the world, what are My sons complaining about? The manna is so distinguished!”

While the Israelites complain, “There is nothing for our eyes but the manna”, the narrator responds, “The manna was like coriander seed” — that is to say, its hue is white and shiny. Note that crystal is a precious substance, so that its associations are very positive, and it appears that because of this, crystal is used as a simile for the manna’s appearance. While the Israelites complain about the boredom that springs from the monochromatic experience of the manna (“But now our soul is dry; there is nothing for our eyes but the manna”), the narrator testifies that the ways of preparing the manna are varied: “And then they ground it in a mill or crushed it in a mortar, cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes.” While the Israelites speak of their food in Egypt as being “at no cost,” the narrator returns to hint that nothing has changed. “The people went about and gathered” — the manna too is given to them “at no cost;” one need only stretch out the hand and take it. While the Israelites claim “but now our soul is dry,” the narrator punctures this complaint by attesting that the manna is moist: “It tasted like something made with olive oil. When the dew settled on the camp at night…”[[2]](#footnote-2) In this description, the narrator consistently emphasizes the security and consistency of this food that the Israelites receive; every night this daily portion of food is laid out the entrance of their tents.

Beyond this, the verse need say no more. The very description of the manna in this place, immediately after their complaint, undermines their arguments. Indeed, even if the presentation of the manna would have been included at the beginning of the story, the reader would understand that there is no substance in the complaints of the *Mitavim*; nevertheless, inserting the characterization of the manna in this precise location highlights this issue more so, with caustic irony.

**EXPOSITION**

**Evaluative Exposition**

At the stage that opens the story, the level of exposition, the supposedly impartial narrator is found in the disingenuous position of telling the reader who will appear in the story. A slight bias of characterization to one side or the other is enough to set the reader on a narrative journey oriented as the verse desires. Generally, these are the details with which the story opens, and they have a great influence on the entire process of reading.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Let us take the example of the story of David, Naval, and Avigayil (I *Shemuel* 25). The reader has great difficulty in evaluating the characters independently; at the beginning, along with the presentation of the characters, the narrator already states (v. 3): “This man's name was Naval, and the name of his wife, Avigayil, and the woman had a fine intellect and a beautiful form, while the man was hard and evil in his dealings.” This fact accompanies and compels the reader from the start, and naturally one responds to the actions of Naval as those of a man “hard and evil in his dealings” and to the actions of Avigayil as those appropriate for a woman of “fine intellect.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Evaluative exposition of this sort is not so common in biblical narrative. Uriel Simon counts only six instances of this in total: the Serpent (*Bereishit* 3:1); Noach (ibid. 6:9); the sons of Eli (I *Shmuel* 2:12); Naval the Carmelite (I *Shemuel* 25:3); Sheva ben Bikhri (II *Shemuel* 20:1); and Iyov (1:1).[[5]](#footnote-5) It may be that one can add to this list a few individual cases (depending on the interpretation and definition of “evaluation”), but in any case, in terms of the quantity of narratives that start with such exposition, we are only talking about a number of isolated instances.

Nevertheless, the narrator often succeeds in communicating character assessment and influencing the reading experience through the exposition without using explicit evaluations. Even a neutral fact given over in the exposition can shape the reader’s anticipation and expectations for the plot in one way or another. The story of Naaman opens with the presentation of the characters, stressing their hierarchical standing (II *Melakhim* 5:1-2):

And Naaman, chief of the army of the king of Aram was **a great man before his master and regarded with favor**, for it was through him that God had given victory to Aram…

And they captured from the land of Israel **a small girl**, and she was before Naaman’s wife.

This focus brings the reader into an environment of class and hierarchy, and it noticeably influences the continuation of the reading and the meaning of the entire narrative.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Similarly, Parashat Vayeshev opens with a description of Yaakov’s settling in the land of Canaan: “And Yaakov dwelled in the land of his father’s sojourning, in the land of Canaan” (*Bereishit* 37:1). It would seem to have been more appropriate to open the next unit (the story of Yosef and his brothers) with v. 2, which features the characteristic opening of the Book of *Bereishit*: “**These are the generations of Yaakov…** Yosef, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers…” Were the new unit to open with the heading “These are the generations of Yaakov,” the description of Yaakov’s residence in the land of Canaan, which is mentioned before this, would be interpreted as the conclusion of the previous narrative — the description of the descendants of Esav on Mount Se’ir, also known as Mount Edom. In other words, this verse corresponds to Esav and his sons, who settle in the land of Edom; Yaakov, by contrast, resides in the land of their father’s peregrinations, the land of Canaan. (See the commentaries of Rashi, Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra, Rashbam and Ramban, who all relate to this connection).

Despite this logical possibility, all of the classic divisions of *Tanakh* open the story of Yosef and his brothers with the sentence “And Yaakov dwelled…” This is how the chapters are divided (with this verse chapter 37 begins); this is how the *sedarim* of the triennial Torah-readying cycle are divided (this verse opens the thirty-third *seder*); and this is, of course, how the weekly Torah portions of the annual Torah-reading cycle are divided (*Parashat Vayeshev* opens with this verse).

Whatever the reason may be for the accepted division that opens the story of Yosef with this verse, let us focus on the literary effect created when we start the narrative with this fact. After Yaakov’s long wanderings, he finally merits to dwell “in the land of his father’s sojourning, in the land of Canaan;” Yaakov has the privilege of returning to his father’s house and his homeland. An introduction such as this arouses the feelings of tranquility and equanimity, certainly in light of the wider context of the stories of Yaakov. Lo and behold, to the surprise of the reader, precisely in the land of Canaan where Yaakov settles, a new tragedy in his life begins, and he is separated for many long years from his beloved son Yosef.

The *midrash* (*Bereishit Rabba* 84:3, et al) responds to this very point, as brought by Rashi ad loc:

Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility, but he was confronted by the disquiet of Yosef. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility in this world, but God says, “Is it not enough for the righteous what is destined for them in the World to Come, that they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world?”

**Explanatory Exposition**

The influence of the introduction of a narrative on its meaning becomes most prominent in what may be called “explanatory exposition.” This phenomenon consists of the narrator’s inclusion of a fact, at the outset, of which the characters are unaware and which becomes clear to them only in the midst of the story. (Tzohar calls this an expositive exposé.[[7]](#footnote-7)) In many cases, a significant part of the tension of the narrative is lost in such an exposition, but this is merely the focus of the reading moving to another point. Talmon notes perceptively that with the help of the exposition (in a unique way, in my view, mainly with the help of explanatory exposition), the reader who knows more than the protagonists “as it were, supersedes them and become a partner with their creator, the author of the narrative.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

For example, at the beginning of the story of the Binding of Yitzchak, the reader is made aware that this is only a test: “After these things, God tested Avraham” (*Bereishit* 22:1). In other words, already at the outset of the narrative, the reader knows that God is not truly interested in child sacrifice (as was the prevailing custom in the ancient pagan world). In this case, the tension remains, because it may still be that Avraham will be required to sacrifice his son; but from a theological viewpoint, it appears that it is worthwhile to state this at the beginning. Whether Yitzchak will ultimately be sacrificed or not, this is only a test for Avraham, not a true divine desire for human sacrifice.[[9]](#footnote-9)

An even better example may be found in the encounter of Rut and Boaz in the field (*Ruth* 2). The narrator informs the reader of the family connection of Boaz to Naomi’s family: “Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, from the family of Elimelekh, a mighty man of valor, whose name was Boaz” (2:1). At this stage of reading, the reader knows what Rut does not: the field which Rut has arrived at “coincidentally” is that of a kinsman. Ostensibly, the narrative thus loses part of the element of surprise which could have been realized in it; were the reader to hear that Boaz is a relative only at the stage at which the character in the story (Rut) hears about this (when she returns from the field to Naomi’s house), the identification with Rut would grow and the revelation of the family link would receive its proper place. Why does the narrator reveal this datum before Rut learns of it? It appears that my friend Yoshi Farjun is right. He claims that the fact that the family connection already arises at the beginning of the narrative causes the reader to anticipate hearing about it throughout the encounter in the field, and naturally, the fact that this relationship is kept secret until Rut returns to the house of Naomi is very surprising and demands an explanation.

In order to clarify this point, let us turn to the brief dialogue between Rut and Boaz at the time of their encounter in the field. After Boaz learns the identity of the girl in his field from the foreman, he approaches her and says (v. 8): “My daughter, will you not listen to me? Do not go and glean in another field, and do not pass away from here. Stay close to my maidservants…” Rut is very surprised by this great act of kindness bestowed upon her, and she expresses her surprise with a revealing question (v. 10): “She fell on her face and bowed to the ground, and she said to him, ‘Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, when I am a foreigner?’”

At this stage, the reader is certain that the secret is about to revealed, and after Rut asks her poignant question, “‘Why… when I am a foreigner?’”, we expect Boaz to respond: You are no foreigner at all; we are related, and of course I am concerned about the misfortune of my kin. We should remember that the meaning of the phrase “foreign” in Tanakh is “outside the family.” This, according to the Sages, is the intent of the verse, “To a foreign people he has no authority to sell her, as he has betrayed her” (*Shemot* 21:8), as Onkelos renders: “To another man.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Naturally, after Rut uses this phrase “I am a foreigner,” it is expected that Boaz will correct her and explain to her that he is showing her kindness because of the familial obligation incumbent upon him.

To the great surprise of the reader, Boaz in his response totally ignores the family context and bases his action on the impressive kindness of Rut towards Naomi, her mother-in-law (v. 11):

Boaz answered and said to her, “I have been told about all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband: how you left your father and mother and your homeland, and you went to a people you had not known yesterday or the day before.”

At this stage of the narrative, the clash between the reader’s knowledge — which relies on the fact which the narrator gives over at the opening of the scene — and Rut’s knowledge becomes oppressive. Why, even at this point, does the family connection remain a secret? Why does Boaz not reveal to Rut the truth about their relationship, which is closer than Rut knows?

In fact, what we have here is not the concealment of the truth from Rut. On the contrary, this scene highlights the deeper truth even more in the eyes of the reader. Specifically because the narrator raises the family issue at the opening of the scene, the reader feels that it is not the family link that motivates the characters. Boaz does not show kindness to Rut because of the family obligations he has, but as a response to the great kindness shown by Rut to Naomi previously. The characters in the narrative do not act from an obligation to the greater community — neither a legal obligation (as Orpa and the anonymous redeemer prove) nor an obligation which relies on cultural mores or family connections. Their activity is based on the attribute of freely-given kindness and on the intimate encounter with the other, an encounter which leads to compassion.

This idea is stressed in the narrative specifically because of the narrator’s preemptive aside that Boaz is a relative of Naomi (and Rut). This datum waits for its practical application, and its lack of realization at this point makes its ultimate fulfillment at the end of the narrative all the more powerful.

**Delayed Exposition**

Naturally, if the exposition is pushed off from its natural place — at the beginning of the story — and it appears at some point later in the narrative, after the reader is already aware of the events of the plot, this has a great influence on the reading. The specific place in which the narrator wants to present the protagonists receives a certain significance if this is not done at the beginning of the narrative. We can term this phenomenon a “late exposition” (Frank Polak suggests “delayed exposition”[[11]](#footnote-11)) — a presentation of characters or another integral element of the plot in the thick of the story and not in its opening. Attention is drawn to the delay of the exposition, since the common way of biblical writing is to present the characters at the beginning of the narrative. This reminds us of the flashback phenomenon which we discussed earlier, but here we are not talking about completing the plot elements, but rather the shattering of a literary convention.

It sometimes appears that the fact that is brought late in the exposition is cited in a place in which it is relevant; until this point, there was no need to mention it.[[12]](#footnote-12) Nevertheless, even in these places, the reader responds to the detail that is noted in light of its textual location, on the basis of what one knows until this point and in light of the context in which the exposition under discussion is first mentioned.

Let us take the story of Ehud ben Gera (*Shofetim* 3). The fact that his antagonist, Eglon, King of Moab, is fat is not mentioned in the opening of the narrative, but only within the description of the presentation of his tribute: “And he brought the gift to Eglon, King of Moab, and Eglon was a very fat man” (v. 17). One may claim that only at this stage of the narrative is this detail relevant; how else can we understand Ehud’s attacking the king without his servants noticing?[[13]](#footnote-13) However, at the end of the day, the reader responds to the entire sentence: Ehud brings the gift to Eglon, and the king is a very corpulent man. In light of the context, it appears that the verse wants to mock the obese king, who is presented as one before whom a large tribute is being brought; indeed, the monarch requires many tributes such as these, as Eglon (recalling “*egel*”, a [fatted] calf?) likes to eat a lot. Delaying the presentation of the king until this stage of the narrative implies an additional layer of reading, allusive and biting, that would not be realized if this expositional detail were mentioned in the introduction of the narrative.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In my series of lectures on the Book of Esther (disseminated through this forum), I have pointed out the late exposition presenting Mordekhai and Esther in chapter 2 (and not in the opening scene). First, the reader is informed that they are looking for a new maiden to reign in Vashti’s stead; this is said already before the presentation of Mordekhai and Esther (2:3-4):

“Let the king appoint agents in every province of his realm to bring all the virgin girls **of good appearance** into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegeh, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. And the girl who pleases the king will reign in Vashti’s stead.” And the matter pleased the king, and he did so.

Only after relating these facts does Scripture (vv. 5-7) introduce Mordekhai and Esther (with a stress on the latter’s beauty):

Now there was in the citadel of Shushan a Jew named Mordekhai, son of Ya’ir, son of Shimi, son of Kish, a Benjamite man… He was fostering Hadassa — she is Ester, his cousin — because she had neither father nor mother**. The girl was of beautiful form and good appearance**, and Mordekhai had taken her as his daughter when her father and mother died.

Naturally, the reader does not encounter the presentation of the characters in this instance in a neutral way; we are not talking about presenting characters in a vacuum, so that at the opening of the narrative the reader does not know what is destined to happen. Since we are already looking for a woman for the king, the discerning reader understands that Esther will be drawn into this.[[15]](#footnote-15) As we have already pointed out in our lectures on the Book of Esther, the *Midrash Rabba* (ad loc.) notes this point and even cites additional examples in which characters are presented in the midst of the plot, at the point at which the powers that be are looking for someone who is appropriate for that role in the narrative:

“And the girl who pleases the king will reign in Vashti’s stead…” Who is fitting for this? Mordekhai: **“**Now there was in the citadel of Shushan a Jew named Mordekhai.” Similarly, “And God saw the Israelites, and God knew” (*Shemot* 2:25). Who is fitting for this matter? Moshe: “And Moshe was tending” (ibid. 3:1). Similarly, “And Shemuel said to the people: ‘Let each man go to this city…’” (I *Shemuel* 8:22); who is fitting for this matter? Shaul, as it says “And there was a man of Binyamin, and his name was Kish” (ibid. 9:1). Similarly, “Shaul and all of Israel heard the words of the Philistine, and they trembled and they feared greatly” (ibid. 17:11). Who is fitting for this matter? David: “And David was the son of a man of Efrat” (ibid., v. 12).

Gathering these four narratives — the selection of Moshe, the selection of Shaul, the selection of David and the selection of Mordekhai — under one roof, the *midrash* points to the late exposition which is revealed in all of these narratives.

As we have said, what unites the presentation of all of these characters is that it does not occur in a vacuum. There is the anticipation of the reader that precedes the presentation of the character; naturally, at the point of presenting the character, the reader feels a response to this expectation, and starts tracking the way this character conducts himself or herself, as anticipated.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In the specific case of delaying the presentation of Mordekhai and Ester until after the search for the king’s consort begins, the narrative gains another contribution. The reader now encounters two “takings” of Ester.

The delayed exposition, “He was fostering Hadassah — she is Esther… and Mordekhai **had taken her** as his daughter when her father and mother died” (v. 7), brings us back to the continuum of the plot (v. 8): “Esther **was taken** to the king’s palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.”

The allusion to the clash between these two takings would be relevant even if the exposition were in its normal place, at the opening of the story. However, once these two takings are put next to each other, the contrast is unavoidable: the reader is struck by the tension between Mordekhai’s adoption of Esther and the agents of the king transporting her to the harem.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Late exposition deserves a more through discussion, but we will suffice with this. The readers of the lecture are invited to investigate other examples of delayed exposition and wonder about their contribution to the narrative.

In our next lecture, we will analyze an entire narrative from the perspective of the arrangement and ordering of its facts. With this, we may conclude this fundamental topic.

Translated by Rav Yoseif Bloch

1. The Septuagint vowelizes the word differently, “*va-yeshevu*” (“and they sat”) rather than “*va-yashuvu*” (“and they came back”): “And the Israelites as well sat and cried.” As there are sources in *Tanakh* in which these two verbs are cited in proximity (*Shoftim* 20:26, 21:2), there are critics who prefer the rendering of the Septuagint for this verb; see P.Beirne, "A Note on Numbers 11:4", *Bib* 44 (1963), pp.201–203. Nevertheless, there is certainly a place for the Masoretic rendering, and it does convey a light criticism of the *Mitavim*, who were dragged in by “the rabble.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It may be that this allusion is the motivation for the shift in terminology; while in *Shemot*, the manna is likened to “a honey wafer” (16:31), here the narrator prefers to compare it to oil, which conjures images of fat and wealth.  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore 1978) offers a wide-ranging analysis of the importance of exposition generally (which does not deal with *Tanakh* per se, but his observations about exposition are relevant to biblical exposition as well). In terms of the biblical narrative, see the doctoral thesis of Yael Tzohar, *Ha-Matzag Ba-Sippur Ha-Mikra’i* (Bar-Ilan University, 5766).The accepted definition of exposition is “the entirety of the materials required for the reader to understand the essence or at least the beginning of the narrative” (Yosef Even, *Millon Ha-Sipporet*, pp.87-88). The “exposition” goes beyond the scope of the narrative; it “exposes” a number of facts that are important for understanding the narrative but do not take a role in the progress of the plot. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As is evident, a subversive reader may not respond to the will of the narrator and may adjust the evaluation of the characters at will. Sometimes, these subversive readings can be very refreshing, but they naturally skew the judgment of the verse.Meir Shalev does this in his reading of the above-mentioned story of David and Avigayil in his book *Tanakh Akhshav* (1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. U.Simon, *"Sippur Mikra’i Bi-Tefisa Ironit: Al Ha-Interpretatzia shel Sippur David U-Vat Sheva," Ha-Sifrut* 2 (5730), p.601. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Yair Zakovitch expands on reading the narrative in light of this assumption in *Gavoah Mei-Al Gavoah* (Tel Aviv 5745).In terms of the exposition under discussion, see pp.18-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tzohar, *Ha-Matzag Ba-Sippur Ha-Mikra’i*, pp.47-51.For other examples of explicative exposition, see: *Bereishit* 18:1; *Yehoshua* 7:1; II *Melakhim* 2:1, 13:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. S.Talmon, *Darkei Ha-Sippur Ba-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 5725), pp.27-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Compare J.P.Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Leiderdrop 1999), p.124. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In the 1917 JPS rendition, this prohibition is rendered in the following way: “To sell her unto *a foreign people* he shall have no power.” In the 1985 edition, this is rendered differently: “He shall not have the right to sell her to *outsiders.*"I assume that the change emerges from the desire of the translators to allow for the Sages’ reading of the verse. See also *Iyov* 19:15, *Kohelet* 6:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. F.Polak, *Ha-Sippur Ba-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 5759), p.116. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This has been justifiably pointed out by S.Bar-Efrat, *Ha-Itzuv Ha-Omanuti shel Ha-Sippur Ba-Mikra* (5739), p.133; R.Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* trans.S.Tzingel, (Tel Aviv, 5748), p.81. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Nevertheless, we might have expected that this fact would be mentioned in the second entrance of Ehud to the king’s chamber (v. 20), where Ehud’s attack on Eglon is described, and not during his first entrance — there Ehud only brings him a gift, but does not harm him.This matter constitutes an additional proof that mentioning Eglon’s obesity alludes to another reading, which is tied to the unique location in which this fact is mentioned. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Garsiel does not see in this fact a delayed exposition at all. On the contrary, according to him, the fact is mentioned before it is relevant, in order not to harm the dramatic continuum of the narrative: M.Garsiel, *“Parashat Ehud ben Gera*,*” Hagut Ba-Mikra* 2 (1976), p.68. However, this fact, as mentioned in the above note, is not included in the first mention of Eglon, and therefore one has the feeling that the narrator specifically delays its appearance intentionally. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Readers who wish to expand on this topic are welcome to read my sixth lecture on Esther, available at: <http://www.etzion.org.il/vbm/archive/11-ester/06ester.rtf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The example of Shaul, which the *midrash* speaks of, is brought in this context by Meir Sternberg in an important essay dedicated to the significance of the order of facts in the narrative: M.Sternberg, "Time and Space in Biblical (Hi)story Telling: The Grand Chronology," in R.M.Schwartz (ed.), *The Book and the Text - The Bible and Literary Theory* (Oxford, 1990), pp.81-145. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. As is well-known, the Sages expand a great deal on this tension, presenting Esther as the wife of Mordekhai, taken from his bed to the royal palace. This reading is also reflected by the Septuagint ad loc., which renders the verse as “He took her as his wife,” echoing the words of the Sages (*Megilla* 13a): “Do not read it ‘as his daughter (*bat*)’ but rather: as his house (*bayit*).” According to the simple meaning of the text, this is impossible, because it is virgin girls, not married women, who are being rounded up by the king. However, it appears that the narrative itself alludes to a similar tension. (We should also remember that in the ancient world, fostering a young girl was often the first step towards an eventual marriage.) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)