**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden**

**as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #21:**

**Above the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**

**Part 2**

**The Root of the Book of Esther**

**and the Holiday of Purim**

**in the Garden of Eden**

II

THE BOOK OF ESTHER AND THE STORY OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Seeing the story of the Garden of Eden and Adam and Chava's sin as the key to understanding the Book of Esther is rooted in the words of *Chazal*:

Where is Haman indicated in the Torah? In the verse (*Bereishit* 3:11): "Is it from (*ha-min*) the tree?"[[1]](#footnote-1) (*Chullin* 139b)

We have already seen that there are two levels to the world. The higher level is the level of the Tree of Life — a world that is entirely good, where evil is not present as an active force, nor even as an idea. The post-sin level is the level of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil — a world in which both good and evil are active and attractive forces, and it falls upon man to distinguish between the two and act in accordance with this distinction by choosing the good and eradicating the evil.

It turns out, to our surprise, that the Book of Esther takes place against a similar conceptual-spiritual backdrop. Studying the book through the prism of the concepts of good and evil creates a clear division of the book into two: The first part of the book is filled with the word good (*tov*) in all its forms, and in contrast the word evil (*ra*) does not appear at all. At a certain point in the story, a reversal in the world of concepts takes place. Various forms of the word evil begin to be used, and from that point on the concepts of good and evil appear one alongside the other. From now on, we will consider the Book of Esther in light of this phenomenon.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The first part of the book is characterized by the elimination of the distinction between good and evil, which is reflected in the fact that not a single phenomenon is described as being evil. The great use of the word "good" in its various forms gives the impression that what is being described here is a world in which there is no evil whatsoever, a world that is entirely good. Of course, other elements at the beginning of the book completely disprove the impression that may arise from the multiple terms of goodness found therein, as they present a corrupt world, driven by lust, external beauty, pride, anger, drunkenness, wickedness and a desire for power. These phenomena highlight the fact that even the many expressions of good appearing in this part of the book relate in fact to things that are not necessarily good, and even to things that are outright evil, as will be explained below.

What this means is that the reality in Shushan — whose central heroes are Achashverosh and Haman — is in fact free of knowledge. However, rather than the elimination of knowledge raising the world above reason, it lowers it below reason to a world in which evil is called good by those who can no longer distinguish between the two, and only the lower part within them guides them in their own lives and in the lives of their country.

**Achashverosh: A Blurring of Good and Evil**

A distinction must be made between two instances of the loss of the knowledge of good and evil, one of which is reflected in Achashverosh and the other in Haman. As for Achashverosh, several elements appear in the first part of the Book of *Esther* that are connected to the expressions of good: external observation, wine and anger.

It can be argued that Achashverosh is characterized by external observation. The main expressions mentioned in connection with good are: 1) "maidens good to look upon"[[3]](#footnote-3) and 2) "it seemed good in his eyes."[[4]](#footnote-4)

The good, which is measured solely by way of the sense of sight, which in turn is controlled by the human eye, denotes Achashverosh's external perception, which is the dominant observation in Shushan — observation that blurs any possibility of true judgment between good and evil according to the true inner content of things. This is not the first time that *Tanakh* deals with such a phenomenon. The root of the external observation that appears in Shushan lies in the first instance of external observation, observation that rests on the eye and sight, that the Torah describes when it considers the woman's observation of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Torah describes the woman's observation of the tree with the same words that characterize the good of Achashverosh:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes…. (*Bereishit* 3:6)

**“And the King Loved Esther”**

Chava's external observation leads to the blurring and confusion of various concepts, to seeing good in a tree that is connected to death — and in the wake of this, to doing evil, to the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Esther too is described at the beginning of the book as good to look upon. This is what puts her in line together with the other maidens for the role of queen. Is she too part of the externality that characterizes the kingdom of Achashverosh?

Admittedly, good looks are the sole criterion for deciding which virgins are to be gathered to the palace — a clearly external criterion. This is the only piece of information known to Achashverosh's servants regarding the maidens who are gathered and brought to Heigai, “the king’s eunuch, the keeper of the women,” as this is the only piece of information of interest to them, the exclusive touchstone for a girl's value in Shushan. However, unlike the other girls, Esther is described already the first time that she is mentioned in the book, not only as good to look upon, but first and foremost as "of beautiful form": "And the maiden was of beautiful form and good to look upon" (*Esther* 2:7). This "form," by way of which Esther excels over those around her, does not yet constitute proof that Esther radiates a presence that goes beyond her external appearance.

Still, Esther's uniqueness stands out in the continuation as radiating out to, being absorbed by and influencing those around her, and it infuses the book with a different spirit that pierces through the wall of externality. The book describes Heigai's impression of Esther as one that does not exhaust itself in appreciating her externals as good to look upon — "And the maiden seemed good in his eyes" (*Esther* 2:9) — but as influenced by deeper layers (ibid.): **"And she obtained grace** (*chesed*) of him.” The preference that Esther receives from Heigai, "And he advanced her and her maidens to the best place *(le-tov)* in the house of the women" (ibid.), surely stems from the *chesed* that distinguishes Esther, and not from her being one of the many beautiful girls. This change for the better is perhaps the only good in this part of the book that does not reflect a shallow or wicked perspective.

However, we should not forget that even this good expresses itself entirely in that external dimension which characterizes Achashverosh's kingdom — the cosmetic realm and the preparations for approaching King Achashverosh (ibid.): "And he speedily gave her ointments to her, with her portions, and the seven maidens, who were meet to be given her out of the king's house.”

This influence of Esther expands to all those around her: "And Esther **obtained favor** in the sight of all them that looked upon her" (*Esther* 2:15). Esther's personality even pierces the barrier of externality of Achashverosh himself, the figure who represents external observation at the beginning of the book. She succeeds in giving rise within him the only love mentioned in the book, by virtue of her inner dimension, by virtue of the grace and favor that distinguishes her:

And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins. (*Esther* 2:17)

Because of this unique trait, Achashverosh accepts Esther's invitation to the first banquet: "And it was so, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she **obtained favor** in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter" (*Esther* 5:2). With this, Esther appeals to Achashverosh to come to the second banquet: "If **I have found favor** in the sight of the king" (v. 8); and with it, she presents her request to the king at the banquet itself: "And she said, If **I have found favor** in your sight, O king… let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request" (*Esther* 7:3); and with it she contends with Haman's decree: "And she besought him with tears to rescind the evil of Haman… and if **I have found favor** in his sight… let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman" (*Esther* 8:3-5).

**“When the Heart of the King was Merry with Wine”**

How is the release from the distinction between good and evil achieved in the Book of Esther, a release that expresses itself in the external perspective described above? The principle factor in this release is wine, which serves in this capacity already in the Torah in the story of Noach's emergence from the ark, as explained in the previous *shiur.* This is why it occupies such a central place in the book.

The word "good" itself appears for the first time in the book as a product of the wine, in the framework of the event that brings Esther the crown:

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry (*tov*)with wine, he commanded… to bring Queen Vashti… (*Esther* 1:10-11)[[5]](#footnote-5)

When Esther needs to bring Achashverosh and Haman together in order to bring Haman down, she knows that it would be useless to turn to Achashverosh with considerations of good and evil, of justice and injustice, because his external perspective does not distinguish between these concepts. She, therefore, turns to him by way of the factor that is perceived as good in Achashverosh's world view, wine: "If it seems **good** to the king, let the king and Haman come this day to the **banquet**" (*Esther* 5:4). At the second banquet, she states: "If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it seems **good** to the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the **banquet**" (ibid. v. 8). Banquet is *mishteh* in *Esther*, literally an occasion for drinking. The wine that causes the blurring of good and evil is itself the good according to Achashverosh.

Along with the wine, Achashverosh's anger is another factor that brings him to lose his reason. Vashi's refusal to obey his commands provokes Achashverosh's wrath: "Therefore the king was very wroth, and his anger burned in him" (*Esther* 1:12). In his anger, Achashverosh accepts the counsel of his advisors regarding Vashti as "good" advice:

If it seems **good** to the king, let there go forth a royal commandment from him… and that the king give her royal estate to another that is better than she… And the matter was **good** in the eyes of the king. (*Esther* 1:19-21)

 This advice turns out to be bad for him, when his wrath abates (*Esther* 2:1). Just as the centrality of wine for Achashverosh serves Esther in her struggle against Haman, the climax of which takes place at the banquet, so too Achashverosh's anger leads to the fall of Haman:

And the king arose **in his wrath** from the banquet of wine… So they hung Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordekhai. **Then was the king's wrath assuaged.** (*Esther* 7:7-10)[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Haman: A Reversal of the Values of Good and Evil**

The expressions of good surrounding the figure of Haman, who, not for naught, is referred to by *Chazal* as "Haman the wicked" (*Megilla* 10b, and elsewhere), bear a different meaning. Haman's "good" is not the good of blurry external observation, which confuses the concepts of good and evil, but rather the "good" of a sinister attitude that reverses the values of good and evil and refers to evil as good. It reaches the point of describing absolute evil as "good" when Haman incites Achashverosh to destroy the Jewish people: "If it seems **good** to the king, let it be written that they be destroyed" (*Esther* 3:9).

Haman is granted the authority by Achashverosh to decide what is good, and so he can impose evil which is good in his eyes: "And the king said to Haman: The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them **as it seems good in your eyes"** (v. 11). This is also the case regarding the advice given to Haman concerning Mordekhai, his personal enemy: Mordekhai is the good man of the book; he holds fast to his faith even against Haman and his threats, he saves the life of the king, and he leads the struggle against the evil decree that had been issued against the Jewish people. Haman's response to his wife's suggestion to destroy the figure that represents the good is: "And the matter **seemed good** before Haman, and he made the gallows (*ha-eitz*)" (*Esther* 5:14).[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Chazal* note a connection between the wicked Haman and the serpent, the symbol of evil:

Rabbi Pinchas said: Two enemies were not cursed until seventy verses were completed in their regard, the serpent and Haman. The serpent – from "In the beginning" (*Bereishit* 1:1) until "Cursed are you, more than any animal" (*Bereishit* 3:14) is seventy verses. Haman — from "After these matters" (*Esther* 3:1) until "So they hung Haman" (*Esther* 7:10) is seventy verses. (*Bamidbar Rabba, Beha'alotekha* 14, 12)[[8]](#footnote-8)

When he reverses the good and the evil, Haman continues in the ways of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, The *Zohar* (I, 36a) notes that the serpent's first statement: "Indeed, God has said: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden" (*Bereishit* 3:1) is the total opposite of the actual words of God: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (*Bereishit* 2:16). The serpent's second statement: "You shall not surely die" (*Bereishit* 3:4) is the opposite of the threat: "For in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (*Bereishit* 2:17). As opposed to God's words that eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is the greatest danger to man, in that it leads to death, the serpent promises that this eating will lead man to his highest level: "Then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (*Bereishit* 3:5).

However, in contrast to the illusion created by the serpent, man in the wake of his eating becomes aware of his lowliness and nakedness: "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (ibid. v. 7), and in the wake of that, shame is stirred up within man. The reversal of good and evil, which is also a lie and evil talk (*lashon ha-ra*), is what characterizes the serpent and Haman: "Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: The serpent spoke evil talk about his Creator" (*Midrash Tehillim* 1, 9); "Nobody knew evil talk as did Haman" (*Megilla* 13b).

Just as Chava's blurry external observation is what enables evil, the serpent's venom, to penetrate into man's world, so too the blurry observation of Achashverosh enables the wickedness of Haman to penetrate into his world and into the governance of his kingdom. Haman's penetration, as it were, into Achashverosh is very prominent in the Book of *Esther.* Instead of the king agreeing to Haman's request to destroy the Jews, he allows Haman to be the voice to which the king's seal is attached:

And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman… And the king said… the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you… and there was written, according to all that Haman commanded… in the name of King Achashverosh was it written, and it was sealed with the king's ring. (*Esther* 3:10-12)[[9]](#footnote-9)

These two stages, the blurring of the concepts of good and evil, and in its wake, the reversal of their values, are attributed in the Book of *Mishlei* (23:31-33) to the work of wine, which, as we have seen, constitutes a major factor in the loss of reason in the Book of *Esther.* In the first stage, the wine leads to a loss of distinction between good and evil, to an equal attitude toward all phenomena: "**Look** not you upon the wine when it is red, when it gives **color** in the cup (*ba-kos*, written *ba-kis*), when it glides down **smoothly**." In the second stage, the wine causes a reversal of values, relating to evil as good, as the work of the serpent: "At the last it bites **like a serpent,** and stings like an viper. **Your eyes shall behold** strange sights, and your heart shall utter **confused words.**"

**Esther – The Restoration of Reason to the Book**

As we have seen, in the first part of the Book of *Esther,* there is no mention of evil whatsoever — in stark contrast to good, which is mentioned many times. Evil is mentioned by name for the first time at the high point of the “banquet of wine” that Esther prepares for Achashverosh and Haman. Esther reveals the evil truth that stands behind the reality that purports to be a world that is entirely good: "An adversary and an enemy, this **evil** Haman" (*Esther* 7:6). This statement creates a two-fold upheaval in the conceptual world of the Book of *Esther.* First, from now on the concepts of good and evil appear alongside each other in the book; second, each of them stands in its appropriate place. From this point on, the book is careful to call the good — good, and evil — evil.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Esther cancels the blurring between good and evil and restores to the book the rule of reason that distinguishes between good and evil. The realization of the restoration of reason takes place when Haman is separated from Achashverosh: Esther asks of Achashverosh, who suffers from a blurring of the concepts of good and evil, that he distinguish between good and evil, by recognizing the fact that Haman represents the absolute evil that hides in the designations of good. With the return of reason to the Book of *Esther*, we no longer encounter wine that, as stated, is a major factor in the blurring of reason in the first part of the book. The Book of *Esther* sobers up from its drunkenness, removes the wine from the table, and we will not encounter it again after the second “banquet of wine.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Both the change that Esther makes in Achashverosh and the change in the role of wine stand out prominently when we consider Esther's many appeals to Achashverosh with the same wording: "If it seems **good** to the king."[[12]](#footnote-12) Esther uses this phrase several times, in both parts of the book, and at first glance this does not accord with our argument that an upheaval takes place regarding the meaning of the word "good."

However, the upheaval is clearly evident from the content of each of the appeals. In the first part of the book, Esther turns to Achashverosh with a request that he come to the banquet that she will make for him: "If it seems good to the king, let the king and Haman come this day to **the banquet**" (*Esther* 5:4). The request that the king come to the second banquet the next day is similarly formulated (ibid. v. 8). In both cases the confused king and the evil Haman are mentioned as a single unit: "Let the king and Haman come," and the "good" according to Achashverosh is just wine, which blurs distinctions and eliminates reason.

In the second half of the book, Esther requests of Achashverosh that he recognize evil, detach himself from Haman, cancel his decree and save the Jewish people:

If it seems **good** to the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request… An adversary and an enemy, this evil Haman. (*Esther* 7:3-6)

If it seems **good** to the king… and I be **good** in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hamedata the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews that are in all the king's provinces. (*Esther* 8:5)

Later Esther requests of Achashverosh that he remain consistent and complete his struggle with evil:

If it seems **good** to the king, let it be granted to the Jews that are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according to this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. And the king commanded it so to be done. (*Esther* 9:13-14).

The root of Achashverosh's blurring, as stated above, lies in the sin of Chava in the Garden of Eden. From this perspective, the process led by Esther may be viewed as a repair of the sin of Chava.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The upheaval caused by the appearance of the concept of evil in the Book of *Esther* finds expression even in Haman, though Haman's capacity to recognize evil is limited to the dimension of the threat to him personally: "But Haman remained to make request for his life to Queen Esther; for he saw that there was **evil** determined against him by the king" (*Esther* 7:7).

The page Charvona merits being the first to adopt the enlightened vision that Esther brings to the book: he correctly distinguishes between Mordekhai and Haman and reminds Achashverosh of the good that Mordekhai did for him: "Then Charvona said… Behold also, the gallows (*ha-eitz*) fifty cubits high, which Haman has made for Mordekhai, who spoke **good** for the king" (ibid. v. 9). Therefore, "Charvona is remembered for **good**."[[14]](#footnote-14)

*Ha-eitz*, which in the first part of the book expresses through its original assignment (the hanging of Mordekhai) the reversal of good and evil, distinguishes in the end between good and evil: Haman is hanged on it, on *ha-eitz* which distinguishes between good and evil. This fact returns us to the words of *Chazal* which draw a connection between Haman and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

Where is Haman indicated in the Torah? In the verse: "Is it from the tree (*ha-min ha-eitz*)?"

The gallows that Haman makes turns out to be a “tree” that has knowledge, the ability to distinguish between good and evil. It is therefore fitting to identify *“ha-eitz”* in the Book of *Esther* with *“ha-eitz"* in the Garden of Eden. This is precisely what the Ramchal writes, based on Kabbalistic sources:

And Haman was hanged on the gallows that is the Tree of Knowledge, for he had wanted to overcome it, but he became subjugated below it. (*Iggerot Ramchal U-vnei Doro*, Letter 14, p. 46)[[15]](#footnote-15)

Throughout the rest of the book, evil relates to Haman and his decree, and good relates to the hope and salvation of the Jews.[[16]](#footnote-16)

From here it is only a short jump to the words of *Chazal* regarding the identity of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil: "The Tree of Knowledge was a grapevine" (see *Sanhedrin* 70a)! This identification takes on profound meaning from the fascinating connections between the Book of *Esther* and the story of Adam and Chava.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The verse continues: "whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?" [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Below is a breakdown of the expressions of good and evil in the Book of *Esther*, in both parts.

The following is a list of the instances of the word "good" in all of its forms in the first part of the book:

	* "On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry (*tov*, literally: good) with wine." (1:10)
	* "To show the peoples and the princes her beauty; for she was good to look upon." (1:11)
	* "If it seems good to the king, let there go forth a royal commandment from him… that Vashti come no more before King Achashverosh, and that the king give her royal estate to another that is better than she… And the matter seemed good in the king’s eyes." (1:19-21)
	* "Let there be sought for the king young virgins good to look upon… that they may gather together all the fair young virgins… and let the maiden that seems good to the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the matter seemed good to the king." (2:2-4)
	* "And the maiden was of beautiful form and good to look upon." (2:7)
	* "And the maiden seemed good in his eyes, and she obtained grace of him… and he advanced her and her maidens to the best place in the house of the women." (2:9)
	* "If it seems good to the king, let it be written that they be destroyed.” (3:9)
	* “The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you." (3:11)
	* "If it seems good to the king, let the king and Haman come this day to the banquet.” (5:4)
	* “If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it seems good to the king… let the king and Haman come to the banquet" (5:8)
	* "Then went Haman forth that day joyful and good of heart." (5:9)
	* "And the matter seemed good to Haman." (5:14)The following is a list of the instances of the word good and the word evil in all their forms in the second part of the Book of *Esther*:

	* "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it seems good to the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.” (7:3)
	* “An adversary and an enemy, this evil Haman." (7:6)
	* "But Haman remained to make request for his life to Queen Esther; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king." (7:7)
	* "Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman has made for Mordekhai, who spoke good for the king, stands in the house of Haman" (7:9)
	* "And she besought him with tears to rescind the evil of Haman the Agagite" (8:3)
	* "If it seems good to the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the matter seem right before the king, and I be good in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hamedata the Agagite… for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come to my people?... Then the king said… Write you also concerning the Jews, as is good in your eyes.” (8:5-8)
	* "The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities… to lay hand on such as sought their hurt (*ra’atam*)." (9:2)
	* "Then said Esther: If it seems good to the king, let it be granted to the Jews that are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according to this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows." (9:13)
	* "They make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day." (9:19)
	* "And the month which was turned to them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day." (9:22)
	* "But when she came before the king, he commanded by letters that his evil device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head." (9:25)
	* "For Mordekhai the Jew… seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his seed." (10:3) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 1:11; 2:2; 2:3; 2:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 1:21; 2:4; 2:9; 3:9; 5:14.  [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to the Midrash (*Lekhach Tov, Esther,* Chap. 1, no. 10), when the heart of Achashverosh is merry with wine, he orders Queen Vashti to appear before him naked. It is possible that the story of Noach, whose drunkenness causes him to remove his clothing, is one of the sources which serve as the backdrop of this *midrash*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Regarding anger as cancelling reason, see the words of Ramchal and Rav Kook. The former writes: "We shall now discuss anger. There is the bad-tempered person… who is so filled with rage as to be senseless and dim-witted… For reason has no hold over him whatsoever, and he is absolutely bereft of sense" (*Mesillat Yesharim*, Chap. 11). The latter speaks of "seething anger that confuses the mind" (*Orot Ha-kodesh* III, p. 244).

When we add to the wine and anger Achashverosh's boasting about his wealth — "when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom" (1:4) — we complete our acquaintance with his character: he is known through three matters: his cup (*koso*), his pocket (*kiso*), and his anger (*ka'aso*) (see *Eiruvin* 65b). So too regarding Haman, money and anger join with wine to form his character: "Then was Haman full of wrath" (3:5; 5:9); "And Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches" (5:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Book of *Esther* attributes another expression of goodness to Haman: "Then went Haman forth that day joyful and good of heart" (5:9). This verse also expresses the essence of Haman — a reversal of good and evil. Absolute evil appears under the heading of good.

The spiritual phenomenon of the reversal of good and evil in Haman is discussed also in the writings of Rav Tzadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin, who explains that Moshe is the knowledge of holiness (the spiritual guidance that is revealed in Moshe's Torah creates the true, precise and penetrating distinction between good and evil), while Haman is the knowledge of the shell (that is to say, the reverse and distorted distinction between good and evil). See *Resisei Laila*, no. 52, s.v. *Ve-Amalek she-kam*; *Likkutei Amarim,* no. 16, s.v. *U-shenei yetzarim eilu*; *Machashavot Charutz*, no. 16, s.v. *Ve-zeh she-amar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See similarly in *Midrash Tadshei* 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Maharal (*Or Chadash*, Chap. 1, s.v. *Rava patach la pitcha*) explains that Achashverosh inclines toward evil or toward good depending on whether he is under the control of Haman, or alternatively, Mordekhai and Esther:

Therefore the people sighed, because Haman caused Achashverosh to incline toward absolute evil. When Mordekhai and Esther later ruled, there was good in the world, to the point that Achashverosh himself inclinded toward good. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This parallels the fact that since Adam and Chava distance themselves because of the sin from the level of a world that is entirely good, in which there is no need to distinguish between good and evil, but only full cleaving to the good, Israel is given the Torah which makes the precise and penetrating distinctions between good and evil, saying of the good with all its details — do it, and of the evil with all its details — do not do it. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. There is no further mention of wine in the Book of *Esther*, but drinking is mentioned later in the book, as part of the laws of Purim for all generations. We will deal with this issue in the last part of the *shiur.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 5:4; 5:8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This is explained also according to Kabbalistic sources, as the Chida reports in the name of Rav Chayim Vital: "Esther was a reincarnation of Chava" (Chida, *Devash Le-fi*, *Alef*, number 4). My colleague Rav Nir Weinberg adds that the understanding that Esther repairs the sin of Chava explains why the deliverance of Purim comes about through a woman. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. As stated in the Midrash:

What did Eliyahu, may he be remembered for good, do? He posed as Charvona, and said to him: My lord, the king, “behold also the tree which Haman has made for Mordekhai, who spoke good for the king, stands in the house of Haman.” For Rabbi Pinchas said: One must say: Charvona is remembered for good. (*Esther Rabba* 10, 9; see also *Bereishit Rabba* 49, 1.

Mentioning Charvona as remembered for good is cited in the halakhic context as well: "One should say: Charvona too is remembered for good" (*OC* 690:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See also the words of Rabbi Tzadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin:

The words “Is it from the tree” allude to this, that the gallows that Haman made fifty cubits high correspond to the fifty gates of understanding of the Oral Law, which is from the side of the Tree of Knowledge. (*Peri Tzadik Purim*, no. 2, s.v. *Ve-achar kakh*). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The expressions of evil are as follows:

"And she besought him with tears to rescind the evil of Haman the Agagite." (8:3)

"For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come to my people?" (8:6)

"The Jews gathered… to lay hand on such as sought their hurt (*ra'atam*)." (9:2)

"That his evil device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head." (9:25)

The expressions of good in addition to those cited in the body of the *shiur* (7:9; 8:5; 9:13) are as follows:

"Then the king said… Write you also concerning the Jews, as it seems good in your eyes." (8:7-8)

"And the month which was turned to them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day." (9:22)

"For Mordekhai the Jew… seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his seed." (10:3) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)