

[Yosippon is cited by

- Rashi: 2 Kings 20:13; Isaiah 21:4; Ezekiel 27:17; Daniel 5:1; b. Berakhot 43a;
- Ramban: Bereshit 49:31; b. Gittin 36a;
- Ibn Ezra : Genesis 37:25; Haggai 2:9; Daniel 9:24.

There was an early English translation (1558) by Peter Morvvyng: *A Compendious and Most Marueilous History of the Latter Tymes of the Jewes Commune-Weal.*]

### Esther Rabbah 8:5

וַיַּגִּד לוֹ מֶרְדֵּכַי אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר קָרְהוּ (אסתר ד, ז).... דְּבַר אַחַר, אֲשֶׁר קָרְהוּ בַּחֲלוֹם, מִלְּמַד שֶׁהַזְכִּיר לָהּ אֵת הַחֲלוֹם  
אֲשֶׁר חָלַם כְּעִנְיָן זֶה:

בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיית לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ, וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל וְחִזְק וּבְהִלָּה עַל הָאָרֶץ וּפְחַד וְרֵעַד לְכָל יוֹשְׁבֵיהָ, וְהִנֵּה שְׁנֵי  
תַּנִּינִים גְּדוֹלִים וַיִּרְעוּ זֶה לְקִרְאֵת זֶה וַיַּעֲרְכוּ מִלְחָמָה, וַיִּנּוֹסוּ לְקוֹלָם כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ. וְהִנֵּה בִּינֵיהֶם גּוֹי אֶחָד קָטָן  
וַיִּקְוֶמוּ כָּל הַגּוֹיִם עַל הַגּוֹי הַקָּטָן לְאַבֵּד זְכָרוֹ מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ, וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם הַהוּא חֲשָׁד לְכָל הָעוֹלָם.

וַיֵּצֵר לְגוֹי הַקָּטָן מְאֹד וַיִּזְעַקוּ אֵל ה'. וְהַתַּנִּינִים נִלְחָמִים בְּאַכְזָרִיּוֹת חֲמָה וְאִין מִפְרִיד בִּינֵיהֶם, וַיֵּרָא מֶרְדֵּכַי וְהִנֵּה  
מַעֲיָן מִיָּם אֶחָד קָטָן עֹבֵר בֵּין שְׁנֵי הַתַּנִּינִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּפְרִיד בִּינֵיהֶם מִן הַמִּלְחָמָה אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ נִלְחָמִים, וְהַמַּעֲיָן גָּבַר וַיְהִי  
לְנַחַל שׁוֹטֵף כְּשֵׁטֵף יָם הַגְּדוֹל וְהוֹלֵךְ וְשׁוֹטֵף בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ.

וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה זָרְחָה הַשָּׁמֶשׁ לְכָל הָאָרֶץ וַיֵּאֹר הָעוֹלָם, וַיִּתְרוֹמֵם הַגּוֹי הַקָּטָן וְהַגְּבוּהִים הַשְּׁפֵלוֹ, וַיְהִי שְׁלוֹם וְאַמֶּת בְּכָל  
הָאָרֶץ. וַיְהִי מֵהַיּוֹם הַהוּא וּמַעֲלָה וַיִּנָּצַר מֶרְדֵּכַי אֵת הַחֲלוֹם אֲשֶׁר חָלַם, וּבָעֵת אֲשֶׁר הֵצִיר לוֹ הַמֶּן אָמַר לְאַסְתֵּר עַל  
יְדֵי שְׁלוּחָהּ, הִנֵּה הַחֲלוֹם אֲשֶׁר סִפְרָתִי לָךְ בְּיָמֵי נְעוּרַיִךְ, וְעַתָּה קוֹמִי וּבִקְשִׁי רַחֲמִים מֵאֵת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וּבּוֹאִי  
לְפָנַי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהִתְחַנְּנִי עַל עַמּוֹךְ וְעַל מוֹלְדָתְךָ.

Mordecai told him all that had happened... Another interpretation: all that had happened in the dream. This teaches that he told her about the dream he had dreamt – as follows:

In the second year of King Ahashverosh, he saw, and behold – there was a great and powerful noise, and confusion on the land, and fear and trembling for all its inhabitants. Then there were two great dragons, screaming at each other, and they entered into battle, and all the nations of the world fled at their sounds. Between them was a small nation, and all the nations arose against the small nation to erase its memory from the earth, and it was a dark day for the whole world.

The small nation was greatly pained, and they called to the Lord, and the dragons were fighting with great cruelty and none could separate them. Mordecai looked, and there was a small spring running between these dragons, and dividing them from the war they had been fighting, and the spring grew stronger and became a roaring river, like the flood of the sea, and threatened to flood the whole land.

Then he saw that the sun was shining on the whole land, and the land was light, and the small nation was lifted up, and the tall ones were brought low, and there was peace and truth in the world.

It was from that day forward, Mordekhai kept that dream that he had dreamt, and when Haman was causing him distress, he said to her [Esther] by means of her emissary: 'This is the dream that I told you in your youth. Now, arise and ask for mercy from the Holy One blessed be He, and come before the king and entreat him on behalf of your people and your family.'

## Esther Rabbah 9:1

ויהי ביום השלישי ותלבש אסתר (אסתר ה, א) – בגדי יפיה ואת עדי תפארתה, ותקח עמה את שתי נערותיה, ותשם יד מינה על הנערה האחת, ותסמך עליה כחק המלכות, והנערה השנית הולכת אחרי גברתה וסומכת עדיה, לבלתי נגע הזֶהב ארצה אשר עליה, ותצהיל פניה ותכס הדאגה אשר בלבה, ותבוא בחרצ הפנימית נכח המלך ותעמד לפניו.

והמלך יושב על כסא מלכותו בלבוש זהב ואבן יקרה. וישא עיניו וירא אסתר עומדת למול פניו, ותבער בו חמתו מאד על אשר הפרה תורתו ותבוא לפניו בלא קריאה. ותשא אסתר את עיניה ותרא את פני המלך והנה עיניו כאש בוערות מרב החמה אשר בלבו.

ותכר המלכה את קצף המלך ותתבהל מאד ותפג רוחה, ותשם ראשה על הנערה הסומכת מינה, וירא אלהינו ויחמל על עמו, ויפן לצער היתומה אשר בטחה בו, ויתן לה חן לפני המלך, ויוסף יפי על יפיה, והדר על הדרה. ויקם המלך בבהלה מכסאו וירץ אל אסתר ויחבקה וינשקה וישלך זרועו על צוארה, ויאמר לה המלך אסתר המלכה למה תפחד, כי הדת הזאת אשר סדרנו איננה מטלת עליך, באשר את רעייתי וחברתי. ויאמר לה מדוע כאשר ראיתך לא תדברי אלי, ותאמר אסתר אדני המלך כאשר ראיתך נבהלה נפשי מפני כבודך.

“It was on the third day, Esther donned royalty and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, facing the king’s palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace” (Esther 5:1).

“It was on the third day, Esther donned” – the garments of her beauty and the jewels of her glory. She took her two young women with her; she placed her right hand on one young woman and leaned on her in accordance with the royal custom, and the second young woman walked behind her mistress supporting her jewels, so that the gold would not touch the ground. She put on a joyful face, masked the worry in her heart, and came to the inner courtyard facing the king, and she stood before him.

The king was sitting on his royal throne in garments of gold and jewels. He lifted his eyes and saw Esther standing before him, and his wrath was greatly enflamed because she had violated his protocol and she came before him without being summoned. Esther lifted her eyes and saw the king’s face, and his eyes were like fire, blazing from the great fury in his heart.

Esther recognized the king’s anger and she was greatly panicked, and her spirit grew faint. She placed her head on the young woman supporting her on the right. Our God saw and took pity on His people, recognized the suffering of the orphan who had placed her trust in Him, invested her with grace before the king, and added beauty to her beauty and magnificence to her magnificence. The king rose from his throne in a frenzy, ran to Esther, hugged and kissed her, and placed his arm around her neck. The king said to her: ‘Queen Esther, why are you afraid? This protocol that we instituted is not incumbent upon you, as you are my beloved and my companion.’ He said to her: ‘Why, when I saw you, did you not speak to me?’ Esther said: ‘My lord the king, when I saw you, my soul was startled due to your greatness.’

## The story of Yannai: Bavli Kiddushin 66a

דתניא: מעשה בינאי המלך שהלך לכוחלית שבמדבר וכיבש שם ששים כרכים ובחזרתו היה שמח שמחה גדולה, וקרא לכל חכמי ישראל. אמר להם, "אבותינו היו אוכלים מלוחים בזמן שהיו עסוקים בבנין בית המקדש, אף אנו נאכל מלוחים זכר לאבותינו!" והעלו מלוחים על שולחנות של זהב ואכלו.

והיה שם אחד איש לץ לב רע ובליעל ואלעזר בן פוערא שמו. ויאמר אלעזר בן פועירה לינאי המלך, "ינאי המלך! לבם של פרושים עליך!" "ומה אעשה?" "הקם להם בציץ שבין עיניך." הקים להם בציץ שבין עיניו. היה שם זקן אחד ויהודה בן גודגדא שמו, ויאמר יהודה בן גדידיה לינאי המלך, "ינאי המלך! רב לך כתר מלכות. הנח כתר כהונה לזרעו של אהרן." (שהיו אומרים אמו נשבת במודיעים ויבוקש הדבר ולא נמצא, ויבדלו חכמי ישראל בזעם.)

ויאמר אלעזר בן פוערא לינאי המלך, "ינאי המלך! הדיוט שבישראל כך הוא דינו, ואתה מלך וכהן גדול כך הוא דינך?" "ומה אעשה?" "אם אתה שומע לעצתי, רומסם." "ותורה מה תהא עליה?" "הרי כרוכה ומונחת בקרן זוית. כל הרוצה ללמוד יבוא וילמוד." ...

ותוצץ הרעה על ידי אלעזר בן פוערא ועל ידי יהודה בן גודגדא ויהרגו כל חכמי ישראל, והיה העולם משתומם עד שבא שמעון בן שטח והחזיר את התורה ליושנה.

It was taught: It once happened that King Yannai went to Kohalith in the desert and conquered sixty towns there. On his return he rejoiced exceedingly and invited all the sages of Israel. Said he to them, "Our forefathers ate mallows when they were engaged in the building of the [Second] Temple; let us too eat mallows in memory of our forefathers." So mallows were served on golden tables, and they ate.

Now, there was a man there, frivolous, evil, and a scoundrel, named Eleazar son of Po'irah. Said [ויאמר] Eleazar son of Po'irah to King Yannai, "O King Yannai, the hearts of the Pharisees are against you." "Then what shall I do?" He said to him, "Make them swear by the plate between your eyes." [So] he made them swear by the plate between his eyes.

Now, an elder, named Yehudah son of Gudgeda, was present there. Said he [ויאמר] to King Yannai, "O King Yannai! Let the royal crown suffice for you [רב לך כתב מלכות], and leave the crown of priesthood to the seed of Aaron." (For it was rumored that his mother had been taken captive in Modi'im. [Accordingly,] the matter was investigated, but not sustained [ויבוקש הדבר ולא נמצא], and the sages of Israel separated themselves in anger [ויבדלו חכמי ישראל בזעם].)

Then said Eleazar son of Po'irah to King Yannai: "O King Yannai! That might be the law for a commoner in Israel, and you, a king and a high priest, shall that be your law?" "Then what shall I do?" He told him, "If you will take my advice, trample them down [רומסם]." "But what shall happen with the Torah?" "Behold, it is bound up and lying in the corner [כרוכה ומונחת בקרן זוית], whoever wishes to study, let him come and study...."

Straightway, the evil burst forth [ותוצץ הרעה] through Eleazar son of Po'irah and through Yehudah son of Gudgeda. All the Sages of Israel were massacred [ויהרגו כל חכמי ישראל], and the world was desolate until Simeon son of Shetah came and restored the Torah to its pristine [glory].

## Judith as another corrective to a problematic story

### Judith 8

Now in those days Judith heard about these things. ... 7 She was beautiful in appearance, and was very lovely to behold. Her husband Manasseh had left her gold and silver, men and women slaves, livestock, and fields; and she maintained this estate. 8 No one spoke ill of her, for she feared God with great devotion. ...

32 Then Judith said to them, "Listen to me. I am about to do something that will go down through all generations of our descendants. 33 Stand at the town gate tonight so that I may go out with my maid; and within the days after which you have promised to surrender the town to our enemies, the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand. 34 Only, do not try to find out what I am doing; for I will not tell you until I have finished what I am about to do." 35 Uzziah and the rulers said to her, "Go in peace, and may the Lord God go before you, to take vengeance on our enemies." 36 So they returned from the tent and went to their posts.

### Judith 9

Then Judith prostrated herself, put ashes on her head, and uncovered the sackcloth she was wearing. At the very time when the evening incense was being offered in the house of God in Jerusalem, Judith cried out to the Lord with a loud voice, and said,

2 "O Lord God of my ancestor Simeon, to whom you gave a sword to take revenge on those strangers who had torn off a virgin's clothing to defile her, and exposed her thighs to put her to shame, and polluted her womb to disgrace her; for you said, 'It shall not be done'—yet they did it; 3 so you gave up their rulers to be killed, and their bed, which was ashamed of the deceit they had practiced, was stained with blood, and you struck down slaves along with princes, and princes on their thrones. 4 You gave up their wives for booty and their daughters to captivity, and all their booty to be divided among your beloved children who burned with zeal for you and abhorred the pollution of their blood and called on you for help. O God, my God, hear me also, a widow.

... 11 "For your strength does not depend on numbers, nor your might on the powerful. But you are the God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, savior of those without hope. 12 Please, please, God of my father, God of the heritage of Israel, Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of the waters, King of all your creation, hear my prayer! 13 Make my deceitful words bring wound and bruise on those who have planned cruel things against your covenant, and against your sacred house, and against Mount Zion, and against the house your children possess. 14 Let your whole nation and every tribe know and understand that you are God, the God of all power and might, and that there is no other who protects the people of Israel but you alone!"

### Judith 10

When Judith had stopped crying out to the God of Israel, and had ended all these words, 2 she rose from where she lay prostrate. She called her maid and went down into the house where she lived on sabbaths and on her festal days. 3 She removed the sackcloth she had been wearing, took off her widow's garments, bathed her body with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment. She

combed her hair, put on a tiara, and dressed herself in the festive attire that she used to wear while her husband Manasseh was living. 4 She put sandals on her feet, and put on her anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and all her other jewelry. Thus she made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her. 5 She gave her maid a skin of wine and a flask of oil, and filled a bag with roasted grain, dried fig cakes, and fine bread; then she wrapped up all her dishes and gave them to her to carry. ... 9 Then she said to them, "Order the gate of the town to be opened for me so that I may go out and accomplish the things you have just said to me." So they ordered the young men to open the gate for her, as she requested. 10 When they had done this, Judith went out, accompanied by her maid. The men of the town watched her until she had gone down the mountain and passed through the valley, where they lost sight of her.

11 As the women were going straight on through the valley, an Assyrian patrol met her 12 and took her into custody. They asked her, "To what people do you belong, and where are you coming from, and where are you going?" She replied, "I am a daughter of the Hebrews, but I am fleeing from them, for they are about to be handed over to you to be devoured. 13 I am on my way to see Holofernes the commander of your army, to give him a true report; I will show him a way by which he can go and capture all the hill country without losing one of his men, captured or slain."

14 When the men heard her words, and observed her face—she was in their eyes marvelously beautiful—they said to her, 15 "You have saved your life by hurrying down to see our lord. Go at once to his tent; some of us will escort you and hand you over to him. 16 When you stand before him, have no fear in your heart, but tell him what you have just said, and he will treat you well." ...

### **Judith 11**

Then Holofernes said to her, "Take courage, woman, and do not be afraid in your heart, for I have never hurt anyone who chose to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of all the earth. 2 Even now, if your people who live in the hill country had not slighted me, I would never have lifted my spear against them. They have brought this on themselves. 3 But now tell me why you have fled from them and have come over to us. In any event, you have come to safety. Take courage! You will live tonight and ever after. 4 No one will hurt you. Rather, all will treat you well, as they do the servants of my lord King Nebuchadnezzar."

5 Judith answered him, "Accept the words of your slave, and let your servant speak in your presence. I will say nothing false to my lord this night. ... 17 Your servant is indeed God-fearing and serves the God of heaven night and day. So, my lord, I will remain with you; but every night your servant will go out into the valley and pray to God. He will tell me when they have committed their sins. 18 Then I will come and tell you, so that you may go out with your whole army, and not one of them will be able to withstand you...."

20 Her words pleased Holofernes and all his servants. They marveled at her wisdom and said, 21 "No other woman from one end of the earth to the other looks so beautiful or speaks so wisely!" 22 Then Holofernes said to her, "God has done well to send you ahead of the people, to strengthen our hands and bring destruction on those who have despised my lord. 23 You are not only beautiful in appearance, but wise in speech. If you do as you have said, your God shall be my God, and you shall live in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar and be renowned throughout the whole world."

## Judith 12

Then he commanded them to bring her in where his silver dinnerware was kept, and ordered them to set a table for her with some of his own delicacies, and with some of his own wine to drink. <sup>2</sup> But Judith said, "I cannot partake of them, or it will be an offense; but I will have enough with the things I brought with me." <sup>3</sup> Holofernes said to her, "If your supply runs out, where can we get you more of the same? For none of your people are here with us." <sup>4</sup> Judith replied, "As surely as you live, my lord, your servant will not use up the supplies I have with me before the Lord carries out by my hand what he has determined."

<sup>5</sup> Then the servants of Holofernes brought her into the tent, and she slept until midnight. Toward the morning watch she got up <sup>6</sup> and sent this message to Holofernes: "Let my lord now give orders to allow your servant to go out and pray." <sup>7</sup> So Holofernes commanded his guards not to hinder her. She remained in the camp three days. She went out each night to the valley of Bethulia, and bathed at the spring in the camp. ... <sup>10</sup> On the fourth day Holofernes held a banquet for his personal attendants only, and did not invite any of his officers. <sup>11</sup> He said to Bagoas, the eunuch who had charge of his personal affairs, "Go and persuade the Hebrew woman who is in your care to join us and to eat and drink with us. <sup>12</sup> For it would be a disgrace if we let such a woman go without having intercourse with her. If we do not seduce her, she will laugh at us."

<sup>13</sup> So Bagoas left the presence of Holofernes, and approached her and said, "Let this pretty girl not hesitate to come to my lord to be honored in his presence, and to enjoy drinking wine with us, and to become today like one of the Assyrian women who serve in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar." <sup>14</sup> Judith replied, "Who am I to refuse my lord? Whatever pleases him I will do at once, and it will be a joy to me until the day of my death." <sup>15</sup> So she proceeded to dress herself in all her woman's finery. Her maid went ahead and spread for her on the ground before Holofernes the lambskins she had received from Bagoas for her daily use in reclining.

<sup>16</sup> Then Judith came in and lay down. Holofernes' heart was ravished with her and his passion was aroused, for he had been waiting for an opportunity to seduce her from the day he first saw her. <sup>17</sup> So Holofernes said to her, "Have a drink and be merry with us!" <sup>18</sup> Judith said, "I will gladly drink, my lord, because today is the greatest day in my whole life." <sup>19</sup> Then she took what her maid had prepared and ate and drank before him. <sup>20</sup> Holofernes was greatly pleased with her, and drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born.

## Judith 13

When evening came, his slaves quickly withdrew. Bagoas closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master's presence. They went to bed, for they all were weary because the banquet had lasted so long. <sup>2</sup> But Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was dead drunk.

<sup>3</sup> Now Judith had told her maid to stand outside the bedchamber and to wait for her to come out, as she did on the other days; for she said she would be going out for her prayers. She had said the same thing to Bagoas. <sup>4</sup> So everyone went out, and no one, either small or great, was left in the bedchamber. Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, "O Lord God of all might, look in this hour on

the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. 5 Now indeed is the time to help your heritage and to carry out my design to destroy the enemies who have risen up against us.”

6 She went up to the bedpost near Holofernes’ head, and took down his sword that hung there. 7 She came close to his bed, took hold of the hair of his head, and said, “Give me strength today, O Lord God of Israel!” 8 Then she struck his neck twice with all her might, and cut off his head. 9 Next she rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts. Soon afterward she went out and gave Holofernes’ head to her maid, 10 who placed it in her food bag.

Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to do for prayer. They passed through the camp, circled around the valley, and went up the mountain to Bethulia, and came to its gates. 11 From a distance Judith called out to the sentries at the gates, “Open, open the gate! God, our God, is with us, still showing his power in Israel and his strength against our enemies, as he has done today!”

12 When the people of her town heard her voice, they hurried down to the town gate and summoned the elders of the town. 13 They all ran together, both small and great, for it seemed unbelievable that she had returned. They opened the gate and welcomed them. Then they lit a fire to give light, and gathered around them. 14 Then she said to them with a loud voice, “Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel, but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!”

15 Then she pulled the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, “See here, the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. 16 As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction, and that he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me.”

17 All the people were greatly astonished. They bowed down and worshiped God, and said with one accord, “Blessed are you our God, who have this day humiliated the enemies of your people.” ...

#### **Judith 14**

Then Judith said to them, “Listen to me, my friends. Take this head and hang it upon the parapet of your wall. 2 As soon as day breaks and the sun rises on the earth, each of you take up your weapons, and let every able-bodied man go out of the town; set a captain over them, as if you were going down to the plain against the Assyrian outpost; only do not go down. 3 Then they will seize their arms and go into the camp and rouse the officers of the Assyrian army. They will rush into the tent of Holofernes and will not find him. Then panic will come over them, and they will flee before you. 4 Then you and all who live within the borders of Israel will pursue them and cut them down in their tracks. 5 But before you do all this, bring Achior the Ammonite to me so that he may see and recognize the man who despised the house of Israel and sent him to us as if to his death.”

... 19 When the leaders of the Assyrian army heard this, they tore their tunics and were greatly dismayed, and their loud cries and shouts rose up throughout the camp.