

'Shiluach Ha'ken' – and the story of Purim

For Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: If a man found a nest in the sea¹⁰ he is bound to let the dam go, since it is written: Thus saith the Lord, who maketh a way in the sea.¹¹ Then, in like manner, if a man found a nest in the sky,¹² in as much as it is written: The way of an eagle in the sky,¹³ he should also, should he not, be bound to let the dam go? — It [the sky] is referred to as 'the way of an eagle,' but never simply as 'way.'

The Papunians¹⁴ asked of R. Mattenah: What if one found a nest upon a man's head? — He replied, It is written: And earth upon his head.¹⁵

Where is Moses indicated in the Torah?¹⁶ [they asked]. — In the verse: For that he also is flesh.¹⁷ Where is Haman indicated in the Torah? — In the verse: Is it [hamin] from the tree?¹⁸ Where is Esther indicated in the Torah? — [In the verse,] And I will surely hide [asthir] my face.¹⁹ Where is Mordecai indicated in the Torah? — In the verse: Flowing myrrh,²⁰ which the Targum renders as mira dakia.²¹

(10) A tree was washed away into the sea and upon it was a bird's nest.

(11) Isa. XLIII, 26. Hence the term 'way' includes the expanse of the sea.

(12) The bird was carrying its nest while flying. (13) Prov. XXX, 19.

(14) I.e., men of Papunia, a town situated between Bagdad and Pumbeditha

(15) II Sam. XV, 32. Earth even though upon a man's head is still called earth and is looked upon as on the ground; likewise a nest upon a man's head is also looked upon as on the ground, and so the law of letting the dam go applies.

(16) I.e., where in the Torah is the coming of Moses foretold? Possibly it is an attempt to find some indication or hint of the name of Moses even in Genesis, the First Book of Moses.

(17) Gen. VI, 3. Heb. בשגם which in the numerical value of its letters is equivalent to the name משה Moses — 345. Moreover this verse adds: Therefore shall his days be a hundred and twenty years, which corresponds with the years of the life of Moses.

(18) Ibid. III, 11. Heb. inv. The first word can be read as Haman, and the second can refer to the tree or gallows upon which Haman was hanged; cf. Esth. VII, 10.

(19) Deut. XXXI, 18. Heb. אסתיר. The second word is very like the name Esther, אסתר both in spelling and in sound. The verse in general foretells the many evils and troubles that shall befall Israel when they forsake the ways of God, and this was the case at the time of Esther, cf. Meg. 12a.

(20) Ex. XXX, 23. Heb. מר דרוור.

(21) The aramaic translation of Onkelos renders the Hebrew by מירא דכיא, which words both in spelling and in sound resemble מרדכי, Mordecai.