דרישה

DRISHA INSTITUTE
FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

Emerging Identities: Esther of Persia, Individuality and Community
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I. <u>**Introduction – Ways to Achieve Characterization in תנ״ך**</u>

(a) Physical Description (עלי, עשו, בת-שבע)

(b) Description of Inner Thoughts (אחי יוסף ;[שמואל א׳, ג, ח] עלי וחנה)

(c) Actions and Speech (אברהם בסיפור העקידה)

(d) Names, Titles and References

Direct v. Indirect

<u>Direct name change</u>

<u>בראשית לב:כח</u>

כח וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב. **כט** וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים וְעִם אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל.

<u>References, titles – which are selected?</u>

<u>שמואל א׳ פרק כ, פסוקים כז-לא</u>
וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל יְהוֹנָתָן בְּנוֹ מַדּוּעַ לֹא בָא בֶן יִשַׁי גַּם תְּמוֹל גַּם הַיּוֹם אֶל הַלָּחֶם. **כח** וַיַּעַן יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת שָׁאוּל נִשְׁאֹל נִשְׁאַל דָּוִד מֵעִמָּדִי עַד בֵּית לָחֶם. **כט** וַיֹּאמֶר שַׁלְּחֵנִי נָא כִּי זֶבַח מִשְׁפָּחָה לָנוּ בָּעִיר וְהוּא צִוָּה לִי אָחִי וְעַתָּה אִם מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אִמָּלְטָה נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-אֶחָי עַל כֵּן לֹא בָא אֶל שֻׁלְחַן הַמֶּלֶךְ. **ל** וַיִּחַר אַף שָׁאוּל בִּיהוֹנָתָן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בֶּן נַעֲוַת הַמַּרְדּוּת הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי בֹחֵר אַתָּה לְבֶן יִשַׁי לְבָשְׁתְּךָ וּלְבֹשֶׁת עֶרְוַת אִמֶּךָ. **לא** כִּי כָל-הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר בֶּן יִשַׁי חַי עַל-הָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִכּוֹן אַתָּה וּמַלְכוּתֶךָ וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח וְקַח אֹתוֹ אֵלַי כִּי בֶן מָוֶת הוּא.

שמואל ב׳ פרק ו, פסוק טז:

טו וְדָוִד וְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעֲלִים אֶת אֲרוֹן ה׳ בִּתְרוּעָה וּבְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר. **טז** וְהָיָה אֲרוֹן ה׳ בָּא עִיר דָּוִד וּמִיכַל בַּת שָׁאוּל נִשְׁקְפָה בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן וַתֵּרֶא אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד מְפַזֵּז וּמְכַרְכֵּר לִפְנֵי ה׳ וַתִּבֶז לוֹ בְּלִבָּהּ.

II. **Biblical Characters with Alternate Names Used**:

Jews in the the Diaspora often had both a Hebrew name and a non-Hebrew name.
For each of the following characters, what are the alternate names used?

(a) יוסף, *See* בראשית מא:מה
(b) דניאל, *See* דניאל א:ו-ז
(c) אסתר, *See* ב:ז

- *Scan/think*: Which are the names that are used in the continuations of each story?

III. **Close Textual Reading of Esther's Character**

Esther's Introduction and Character – פרק ב

1. Read through פרק ב׳, פסוקים א-ז. How is אסתר introduced? Who is introduced first here, and which character is actually important for the story in פרק ב? What is significant about this introduction? How does this introduction influence and inform the reader's initial impression of אסתר?

2. The description, (ב:ז) ״וְהַנַּעֲרָה יְפַת-תֹּאַר וְטוֹבַת מַרְאֶה״ is oddly placed between two facts related to Esther's familial status. This information is the kind that is often given when female characters are introduced, but we would likely expect it to be given in relation to Esther's entrance into the harem. What then is the significance of it being included here? How does it shape her identity?

3. אסתר is introduced with both her Hebrew and Persian names. Recall, or scan through the remainder of מגילת אסתר, and note what she is called for the rest of the story.

   See specifically פרק ט, כט. What is she called there? Why is this significant? What does it say about her position vis-à-vis the Jewish community at that point in the story?

Esther's Development Throughout פרקים ד׳ and ה׳

4. In פרק ב׳ compare Esther's behavior in פסוקים י, טז, כ, כב.
   - Focus on Esther's character with regard to obedience and passivity.
   - *Why* does she not reveal her origins in פסוק י׳?
   - Pay attention to the verb form in פסוק טז.
   - When is the first time she is "active?" Is this a change from what we have earlier seen?

5. At the beginning of פרק ד' Mordecai again tells Esther what to do.
   - Note the use of language in פסוק ח', and recall ב:י and ב:כ.
   - What word/root is used in all three places?

6. How does Esther respond in פסוק י'? What does this reflect regarding her identity and development?

7. How much time has passed since Esther left Mordechai and married Ahashverosh? (Compare ב, טז with ג, ז.)

8. How, by the end of the פרק, have the tables been fully turned? How is ד:יז a reversal of ב:כ? In what way does this reflect Esther's identity transformation?

9. Mordecai had told Esther (a) to reveal her identity and (b) to beg the king; *see* ד:ח.
   - What does she ultimately do? Does she shed her identity and her dignity? How does she present herself to the King? *See* ה:א.

   - Which aspect of Esther *specifically* does Ahashverosh respond to? *See* ה:ב?

10. What is the literary and symbolic significance of Esther standing at the threshold to the throne room?

Question for thought

Esther's character is undoubtedly changed as she develops and transforms her identity and behavior. Nonetheless, all of it is still Esther just navigating what others want from her. Should she do what Mordecai wants, or be the person that Ahashverosh wants?

Who is she really? Do we ever find out?