

**The
Book
of
Esther:**

A poetic reading

Jeffrey M Cohen

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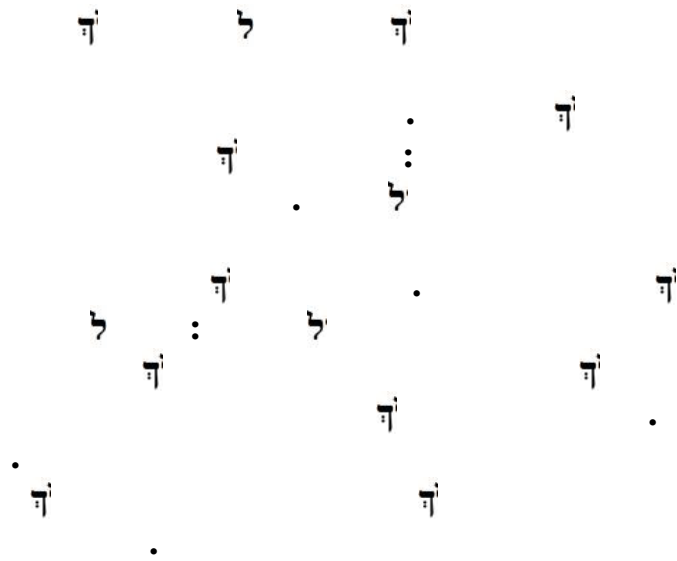
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Here's a random taster....



**Memuchan gave their unanimous view
That Vashti's act might provide a cue
To many Persian and Median wives
To end their husbands' control of their lives,
In the mistaken belief they could disregard
Instructions unfair –
Or just too hard.
So, in the light of the king's humiliation,
They advised him to issue a proclamation
That Vashti had forfeited her position,
For treating the king with derision,
And banishment was to be decreed -
Or even death, if the king agreed.**

**Ahasuerus issued the proclamation,
To be circulated throughout the nation,
Demanding of wives to make it clear
That, to their husbands' desires,
They must ever adhere.**

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**So many languages were spoken
In the sprawling Persian lands -
From India to Ethiopia,
Crossing mountains, seas and sands -
That they had to employ translators,
Members of the guild,
Masters of literary nuances,
In scribal art most skilled,
Employing the variant alphabets,
Scripts and cuneiforms,
Languages and dialects,
Jargons, stylistic norms.**

**The proclamation was issued
In Old Persian and Pahlavi;**

**In Pamir and Kurdish,
As well as in Nepali;
In Parthian and Farsi,
In Sanskrit and in Hindi;
In Urdu and Pushtu,
And polished Gujarati;
In Tadhiki and Yaghnobi,
Not forgetting Sogdian;
Ossetic and Baluchi,
And Khwarazmian.**

**But it all proved counter-productive
To the prestige of the king,
For those far-flung warrior tribesmen
Couldn't conceive of anything
More preposterous than a wife
Defying her spouse,
On any single issue –
No argument or grouse!**

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**In Shushan lived Mordechai,
A Benjaminite,
Whose family, originally,
Had suffered the plight**

**Of being dragged into exile
After witnessing the sight
Of their Temple,
Having been set alight.**

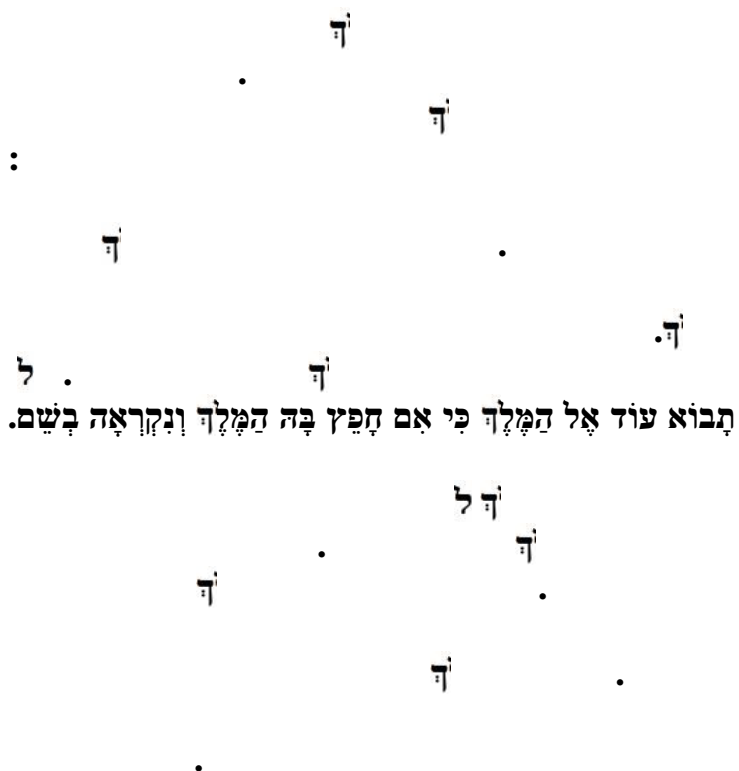
**He'd made a new life in Babylon,
And fostered his uncle's child:
A girl of striking beauty;
Once seen, forever in mind.
Named Hadassah by her parents,
Who, not long after,
Had died.**

The Persians called her Esther,
After Venus, goddess of love;
Such beauty, they asserted,
Was a gift from gods,
Above.

Mordechai's feelings for her
Were wholly pure,
Yet he dreamt that,
One day, when she was mature,
She'd want him as her husband,
To share the pious life,
And become a veritable model
Of the true Jewish wife.

Imagine, then, how he felt
When the king's men appeared;
He could barely hold back his anger
As they stood around and leered
At his innocent Esther,
Before putting her in their carriage;
A ride, he sensed, would soon lead
To her inevitable royal marriage.

**Now, Mordechai had assured her,
 When he first heard of the parade,
 That, if chosen, God would protect her,
 So she mustn't be afraid,
 But keep the Jewish dietary laws
 And be modest in her dress;
 And never disclose to anyone
 That she was a Jewess.**



**He kept a daily vigil,
 In front of the women's gate;
 Anxious for Esther's safety,
 And to know her precise fate.**

Hegai, who was charged
With all the girls' supervision,
Regarded Esther's welfare
As his heaven-entrusted mission.
Impressed with her grace,
Her charm and modest way,
He provided her dietary preference,
Scrupulously, each day.

He allocated to her
Seven attentive maids,
Who gave her daily massages,
And set her hair in braids.

He also provided
The most spacious suite,
While the other girls' quarters
Were decidedly down-beat.

At the end of the twelve months
Of that thorough preparation,
The king would enjoy
A conjugal relation,
With each maiden,
To ascertain

Whether, beyond her beauty,

She had a brain,

And a manner,

Pleasing in his eyes -

And was worthy enough,

For him to prize.

For just one night

She'd share his bed;

If she failed the test,

She'd be led

By Shashgaz, head

Of women's affairs,

To the concubines' palace

Where, free of all cares,

She'd spend her life

Separated from men,

Never knowing if –

Or, indeed, when -

She'd see her loving family

Again,

Or whether she'd

Be called by name

To provide royal pleasure –

With no personal gain.

When it was Esther's turn

To be seen by the king,

She didn't ask Hegai

For anything

To enhance her beauty,

To conceal a flaw,

Or provide an advantage

The king couldn't ignore.

Yet, as soon as she entered,

She radiated light,

As if Venus had appeared

In the very sight

Of that august gathering,

To bless the king's choice,

And bestow upon Esther

Her assenting voice.

The king's heart was smitten;

He crowned her head,

As Queen of Persia

In Vashti's stead.

**And his currency reserves became
Considerably depleted,
He naturally turned to Haman,
To reverse that situation,
And made him Chief Minister
Of the entire Persian nation.**

**No one knew, or if they did,
They didn't dare disclose
That Haman's aristocratic gait**

**Was all a contrived pose;
For his dad had been an attendant
At the Karzum village pool,
Where Haman was the hair-dresser;
His education –
Just pre-school!**

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