

## ***The Twelfth Pole***

Five hundred years ago there lived a king in Persia who was a descendant of King Achashverosh. He took interest in the history of his family and found out that the Jewish people had in its possession an ancient handwritten parchment called "*The Scroll of Esther*," which describes in detail the origin of his ancestor's royal dynasty.

The Persian king researched the details of the scroll. Among other interesting facts he learned that is written in the scroll that Haman had offered to pay King Achashverosh 10,000 silver ducats for the right to do whatever he desired with the Jews in his extensive kingdom.<sup>1</sup> He also discovered that in the end the money was not paid. This sparked in him a clever idea.

He summoned the rabbis and the leaders of the Jewish community and asked them: "Is everything written in your Scroll of Esther true?"

The Jews could not grasp the intention of the king, but they of course assured him that everything written in Megillat Esther is true.

"If that is the case", said the king, "I command you to pay the 10,000 silver ducats you owe my ancestors!"

The Jewish rabbis tried to explain to the king that King Achashverosh remitted the money to Haman, as it says explicitly in the scroll: "The money is given to you"; but the king did not give in. "I am a descendant of King Achashverosh and you are the descendants of the Jewish people. I want the money within a month. If not – you will be expelled from your homes!"

The harsh decree shocked the rabbis. All over Persia the Jewish leaders proclaimed days of prayer and fasting. The synagogues were full of people saying Psalms day and night, and large sums of charity were distributed.

The Jewish leaders tried to estimate how much money they would be able to collect. Within a few days they reached the conclusion that even if they were to sell all their properties, they would not reach the sum that the king requested. Nor would there be enough time to send emissaries to other countries in order to collect money from Jewish communities outside of Persia.

In their desperation, they decided that their best option was to send a messenger to the "Holy Ari," **Rabbi Yitzchak Luria**, who resided in Tsfat in the Holy Land in order to ask for his blessing and advice.

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<sup>1</sup> "In the days of Achashverosh who ruled over 127 states." (Esther 1:1)

The messenger sped away on a fast camel and shortly arrived in Tsfat. He handed over the letter written by the rabbis of the Jewish community in Persia and pleaded in tears for help, asking the holy *Ari* to pray on their behalf to our Father in Heaven.

The Holy *Ari* went into his private study for a while and then returned to the messenger, holding a small box in his hand.

The *Ari* said to him: “The Jews of Persia have repented with a full heart and the evil decree has been revoked. There is no need to pay the ransom money.

“Instead, on the day of payment, the leaders of the Jewish community are to hand over this box to the king. The box must not be opened by anyone but the king.”

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Meanwhile, the king was very satisfied with his plan. If the Jews would pay him the money – all the better. If they did not, he would confiscate their property after the expulsion and would make a tidy profit in any case.

That night the king did not sleep well. He had a fearful dream:

A mighty storm was raging outside his palace. Suddenly the windows to his room burst open. A man clad in white with fiery eyes entered his room through the window. The king wanted to cry for help, but the words got stuck in his throat and he was unable to utter a word.

The white figure took him by the hand and led him outside through the open window. They passed houses and fields until they reached a forest. There was an open area between the trees.

The white figure turned to the king and asked him in a stern voice: “What do you see in the open area?”

“I see a high pole – and somebody is hanging from its top,” the king said in fear.

They continued their walk another few steps, and again the figure in white asked the king what he saw.

“I see another high pole with somebody hanging from its top – and there is another one and yet another...”

“How many poles do you see?” the figure asked.

“I can see eleven poles with people hanging from the top – and over there is another pole – but nobody is hanging from it,” said the king, trembling with fear.

“The people hanging there are Haman and his ten sons,”<sup>2</sup> said the figure to the king. “The empty pole is meant for people who walk in their evil ways!”

A shiver went over the body of the king.

The white figure took the king by his hand and led him back to the king’s palace. The figure made the king sit down next to his desk and said, “Write that you relinquish all your claims against the Jews and sign the document with the royal seal!”

The king wrote the document with a trembling hand, signed it, and stamped the royal seal over his signature. He handed the document to the man in white who disappeared through the window.

Suddenly the king woke up from his nightmare. He found himself sitting next to his desk, shivering with fear and his face covered by cold sweat.

Outside there was a quiet summer night.

“What a strange dream I had,” he thought and went back to sleep in his bed.

The following morning he still remembered the dream but dismissed it.

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The messenger came back from Tsfat to the Jewish leaders in Persia with good tidings. Still, the Jews did not rest the whole month. They studied much Torah, spent many hours in prayer every day, and took upon themselves to correct everything that needed to be corrected. Especially, they asked forgiveness of each other and acted with brotherly love.

When the designated day came, the leaders of the Jewish community took the box that they had received from the Holy Ari and approached the king.

“Where is my money?” the king roared.

“Your majesty, we have brought this box for you,” said the spokesman of the delegation and handed the box to the king.

The king took the box in his hand, opened it and found a signed document inside. When he started to read what was written there, he suddenly screamed in terrible fear and fell in a swoon to the floor.

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<sup>2</sup> See Esther: 9:6-14.

The king's doctors who immediately were summoned finally managed to wake him up. The king was trembling hands and feet.

"So it was not a dream," he whispered in panic. "The next hanging pole was meant for me because of my behavior towards the Jews..."

Nobody knew what he was talking about, but when he recovered somewhat he gave over the document to the Jewish leaders and said: "Everything which is written in this document is hereby established in law. I give up all my claims regarding the debt. I promise not to harm any Jew from now on. You are released from all previous monetary claims as well."

The Jewish leaders immediately dispatched a special messenger in order to express their gratitude to the Holy Ari. All over Persia the Jews celebrated parties of thanksgiving to G-d for their wonderful delivery. *"The Jews had light and happiness and joy and honor."*<sup>3</sup>

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "*Chassidic Gems*," by Tuvia Litzman.

*Connection:* Saturday night will be the 448th yahrzeit of **Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the "Holy Ari,"** leader of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Safed Kabbalists.

*Biographic note:*

**Rabbi Yitzchak Luria** [of blessed memory: 5294 - 5 Av 5332 (1534 - July 1572)], Known as "the holy Ari," revolutionized the study of Kabbalah and its integration into mainstream Judaism during the two years he spent in Zefat before his death at 38. ([\*For a more full biography\*](#)) ([\*For teachings of the Ari translated into English\*](#))

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 8:16