



THE VASHTI
BALL

The Drag Shpiel Explained:
The True Tails of Vashti

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Background, Explanations and a message from Mordechai

Queen Vashti's Tail...

Many people may be familiar with the Babylonian Talmudic commentary (Megillah 12b) which suggests that one of the reasons that Vashti refused to come before her husband, King Achashverosh, was because she had grown a tail. However, the Talmud is more specific. It does not merely say that Vashti grew a tail, rather it suggests that it was the angel Gabriel who gave her a tail.

What?

The 16th century Polish rabbinic figure known as the Maharsha, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555 – 1631) saw an important connection between the story of Vashti and the creation of Woman found in the book of Genesis. He notes that the word that the Bible uses for "rib" is also often used to mean "tail".

But who in the book of Genesis had a tail?

The story of Lilith...

14th century Kabbalists/mystics add two vital pieces of information to help decode this story.

Their first idea is that in the original creation story, God created the world as one of balance and equality. The moon was equal in brightness to the sun and similarly Adam had a feminine human partner who was his equal. Her name was Lilith. But Adam and the sun conspired to convince the angels that the world would be more orderly if there was a different power structure with only one person at the pinnacle of power. The moon was demoted to a lesser light and accordingly Lilith was asked to become subservient to Adam. But Lilith refused, and abandoned humanity to become a demon who haunted the world, reminding us of what once was and was no more.

The Kabbalists' second idea was the secret in the creation of Eve. The angels cleverly planned to replace Lilith by creating Adam's next female partner- Eve, from Adam's own rib, thereby ensuring that he remains supreme and that Eve becomes a lesser creation- a derivative!

The angels Gabriel and Michael took Adam's rib and planned to ask God to transform it into Eve. However, on their way to God, they were approached by Lilith, who had transformed into a bird-like demonic form. She fiercely battled the angels and although she was defeated, she managed to wrench the rib from the angels'

grasp and to replace it with her own tail. Gabriel had no choice but to ask God to create a woman out of Lilith's tail as Adam's rib had been yanked from his grasp. And this was the true creation story of Eve- a woman created not from Adam's rib, but a creation born from Lilith herself!

The great secret...

The angels hid these events from Adam, so he was left to think that Eve was a lesser being. He was unaware of the great truth that Eve was equal to him in power, was in fact created completely independently of him, crafted from the tail of the feminine -Lilith. Furthermore, all of Adam and Eve's children were now equal parts Adam and equal parts Lilith, for they all secretly had inherited Lilith's tail!

The Kabbalists see great spiritual importance in this story and believe that humanity is on a long and circuitous journey to reveal this secret. They believe that one day the world will be restored to the original state of balance where the moon and the sun have equal power, and that all people, regardless of race or gender will be equals. Every month Jews pray on the festival of the new moon, awaiting the day that the moon will be restored to its former glory.

A queer understanding of Purim:

We can now understand the hidden meaning behind the Purim story.

It's not God...

God is not mentioned in the Megillah. This is intentional, because the spirit behind the action is actually not God at all, but Lilith. The story of Purim is a recreation of the creation story itself.

Vashti...

The story begins with Vashti, who discovers a unique feminine power that can be conjured through the joys of party, revelry and dance. This power is the spirit of Lilith and it manifests itself when the angel Gabriel reveals that Vashti has access to Lilith's tail. Inspired by Lilith, Vashti realizes that she is equal in power to her husband, and thus refuses to submit to his will. But her mistake is that she thought that she was special, that she alone had Lilith's tail. Although women can see the tails more easily, we are all the children of Adam and Lilith/Eve and we all have tails! Thus, Vashti unknowingly took on the patriarchy alone, and so she, like Lilith, was crushed by the king and Haman who made an example out of her. They killed her and thereby tried mightily to send the message to all that women must never challenge their husbands. Men would remain on top!

Haggai the eunuch...

When the king wanted to replace Vashti, he, like Adam, wanted to find the most subservient women who would never stand up to him. But ironically, the plan was tasked to the king's eunuch Haggai, who, because he was neither a woman nor a man, was able to see past the differences between masculinity and femininity. They usurped the king's plan to find a submissive woman and instead gathered the strongest and most fabulous women in the land to come together, empower one another and choose amongst themselves who should represent womanhood as Queen. They chose Esther because of her exceptional kindness (a uniquely Jewish value instilled to her by her "never married" uncle Mordechai), and helped her win the king's heart to become queen.

Esther..

But Esther did not reveal any of this to the king. When she learned that Haman had convinced the king to enact genocide against the Jews for their beliefs against the patriarchal power structure, she knew this was the moment to stand up for all vulnerable peoples. Like Vashti before her, she invoked the power of joyous revelry to ready herself to take on the king. She invited Haman and the king to three epic parties. The first was in honor of Lilith, the second was in honor of Vashti, and the third was in honor of all women, oppressed peoples, and all those who are ever made to feel 'lesser'.

Flanked by the spirit of Lilith and Vashti, at the third party she stood up to the king and Haman, revealing how she became queen because of these uniquely Jewish values. She proudly noted that not only does she bear the divine feminine tail of Lilith, not only do all of the party goers bear the tail too, but even the king himself has a tail, because all of humanity are Lilith's children! The king loves Esther. And every human being who opens themselves up to love can see the secret- each of us has access to the equal powers of both masculinity and femininity. In this infinite diversity we are all equal in splendor.

Haman, who can not love, cannot see this truth, and mistakenly clings to the idea that some people are more valuable than others. So instead of understanding Esther's point about equality, he believes that now she alone is in charge, and that he must be submissive to her; he grovels at her feet. The king is enraged that Haman only sees mankind as a battle for power, and thus orders his death and the death of his philosophy (represented by the death of his children).

Epilogue...

This is not the end of the story, but a recognition of the battle for equality that began with Lilith. And so, the megillah story ends with war, not peace. It reminds us that we are still in this battle today. This is the battle for a better world. The fight to stand up against tyranny, against oppression, against misogyny, racism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia and exploitation of any kind. Purim is the celebration of the heroes of this ongoing war. It particularly celebrates heroes that have not been part of the narratives dictated by those in power. It canonizes the story of women like Esther, eunuchs like Haggai and Harvona, and even tragic figures like Vashti and Lilith.

Disco!

Tonight we use the light of the disco ball to represent the original and future power of the moon. Under the disco ball we are all equal; we are all special; and we are all safe. In this light each of our tails are revealed, reminding us that we are not only the children of Adam, we are the children of Lilith. Our tails represent our differences, our nonconformity, and our queerness. They teach us that the true nature of the world is not the battle for dominance, but the dream of equality.

These are The True Tails of Vashti.