

WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

International Day of Study

A Day in the Life of the Harem Text

Text #1

By B. R. Redman, *Introduction to The Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1922)

It is a world in which all the senses feast riotously upon sights and sounds and perfumes; upon fruit and flowers and jewels, upon wines and sweets, and upon yielding flesh, both male and female, whose beauty is incomparable. It is a world of heroic, amorous encounters...Romance lurks behind every shuttered window; every veiled glance begets an intrigue; and in every servant's hand nestles a scented note granting a speedy rendezvous...It's a world in which no aspiration is so mad as to be unrealizable, and no day proof of what the next day may be. A world in which apes may rival men, and a butcher may win the hand of a king's daughter; a world in which palaces are made of diamonds, and thrones cut from single rubies. It's a world in which all the distressingly ineluctable rules of daily living are gloriously suspended; from which individual responsibility is delightfully absent. It is the world of a legendary Damascus, a legendary Cairo, and a legendary Constantinople...In short, it is the world of eternal fairy-tale—and there is no resisting its enchantments.

Text #2

Esther 1:9-12

In addition, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for women, in the royal palace of King Ahashverus. On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs in attendance on King Ahashverus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing a royal diadem, to display her beauty to the people and the officials; for she was a beautiful woman. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs.

Text #3

Esther 2:17-18

The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the virgins. So he set a royal diadem on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. The king gave a great banquet for all his officials and courtiers, 'the banquet of Esther.'

Text #4

Esther 2:8-10

When the king's order and edict was proclaimed, and when many girls were assembled in the fortress Shushan under the supervision of Hegai, Esther too was taken into the king's palace under the supervision of Hegai, guardian of the women. The girl pleased him and won his favor, and he hastened to furnish her with her cosmetics and her rations, as well as with the seven maids who were her due from the king's palace; and he treated her and her maids with special kindness in the harem.

Text #5

Esther 4:4-10

[On the decree] When Esther's maidens and eunuchs came and informed her, the queen was greatly agitated.... Thereupon Esther summoned Hatach, one of the eunuchs whom the king had appointed to serve her, and sent him to Mordecai to learn the why and wherefore of it all.... When Hatach came and delivered Mordecai's message to Esther, Esther told Hatach to take back to Mordecai the following reply:... When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther.

Text #6

Esther 2: 12-14

When each girl's turn came to go to King Ahashverus at the end of the twelve months' treatment prescribed for women (for that was the period spent on beautifying them: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics, and it was after that that the girl would go to the king), whatever she asked for would be given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. She would go in the evening and leave in the morning for a second harem in charge of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, guardian of the concubines. She would not go again to the king unless the king wanted her, when she would be summoned by name.