

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing...”

by David Niedrauer

One of the primary themes stressed during the festival of Purim is the idea of the hiddenness and mystery of God. This emphasis on hiddenness is manifest in many of the Jewish traditions surrounding the festival and also in the Biblical narrative.

Although Hashem’s miraculous deliverance and salvation of His people is present in many aspects of the story, Esther is the only book of the Jewish Scriptures which fails to reference God directly by any of His popular titles.

Esther, the heroine, involves herself in secrecy and intrigue when admonished by her guardian Mordechi to conceal her identity from King Achashveros and his royal court. Even the very name “Esther” (אֶסְתֵּר) derives from a Hebrew word signifying secrecy and mystery (סָתַר, *satar*).

This Hebrew word is found nearly 80 times in the Jewish canon and provides much insight into the intrigues of the Purim story. It is (like most Hebrew words) reducible to a three-letter root:

סָתַר

1. The first letter is a samekh (ס) which symbolizes a thorn bush and connotes the idea of a protective hedge.
2. The second letter is a tav (ט) which is represented by two crossed sticks and signifies a sign, signal, or monument.
3. The third letter of the root is a resh (ר) which is pictured as the head of a man and usually represents prominence, importance, beginning, or leadership status.

Put it all together, and you have:

A protective hedge or barrier is a sign (of) the Head (Hashem).

to conceal - סָתַר
(*satar*)

Definition in Biblical Hebrew:

- To conceal, hide
- To hide so as to protect

In the story of Esther, this view of hiddenness is amply demonstrated. The events of the story do not mention God’s name directly, but in the peripheral vision of your mind, you can almost see the rustle of the curtains as He passes by. The secrecy itself becomes a sign of His presence.

In the name of Esther, the addition of the letter alef (a letter symbolizing lordship, mastery or leadership) preceding the three letters of the root serves to personalize the concepts inherent in the verb:

Esther was the master or example of concealment or secrecy.

Thus, the Hebrew letters themselves point us to the story of Esther to learn why and how God hides Himself.

To understand the message of Esther, it is helpful to examine other uses of the word *satar* and its derivatives throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

“The **secret** things belong to Hashem our God; however, the things that are revealed belong to us and to our posterity forever so that we may fulfill all the requirements of this Torah.” (Deut. 29:29)

Like Esther and Mordechai, we can’t see the hidden things that go on around us. We do not see Hashem’s plan clearly. What we do know, however, is what God has required of us. His will is not

hidden. In the Purim story, Esther had a choice to make. It appeared to her that if she chose what was wrong, she would be safe, and if she chose what was right, she would die. The actual truth was far different, but all Esther had to know was the will of God. She had no need to know the outcome.

“I am a God at hand, says Hashem, and not a God far away. Can any **hide** himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says Hashem. Do not I fill heaven and earth? says Hashem.” (Jeremiah 23:23-24)

While Hashem’s purposes are often hidden from us, our actions are never hidden from Him. Just as it was in the days of Esther and Mordechai, so it is for us today. God expects His people to make proper choices, knowing that He sees.

“It is the glory of God to **conceal** [lit. *cause to be hidden*] a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.” (Proverbs 25:2)

Concealing things is God’s normal way of operating in this world. Why does He do that? Because He wants us to seek Him. As the apostle Ya’acov said, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5)

Many things in this life are hidden from our eyes, but there are a few things that we will always know. We know the will of God. We know that He sees our actions and expects righteous choices. And we know that He wants us to seek Him. These are the things that He has revealed.

Do His will. Remember that He sees. And seek Him with all your heart.

This is the message of Purim.

