

Reveal or Conceal



Dear Friend,

Look at that baby duck, the cute little kid dressed as a Yerushalmi, the giraffe.

Look again.

It's your neighbor. No, a niece. No, it's a little girl I've never seen before. Oh, it's my student's sister.

Look once. Look again.

Reveal. Conceal.



It's the dichotomy that gives a thrill to dressing up in costume. And it runs through all of Purim.

Just a quick look at the name, Megillas Esther, and we see the contradiction bound up together, right there. Megillah means to reveal, legalos. And yet, the name Esther is related to hester, to conceal. **Reveal-Conceal. Look once and you think you've got it. Look again and it's all a mystery.** And then look all over again, you think you begin to understand. But then another look...

And what about the story of Purim itself?

Even as events unfold—reveal themselves—there is so much concealment. **Hashem's hand is hidden beneath power games and political rivalry.** There's insubordination, rebellion and secret plots, interwoven with parties and wine and feasts. The clothing: majesty and sackcloth, the splendor of Mordechai's clothing

versus Achashveirosh's transgressive display of the Kohen Gadol's garments. Plots are foiled, and worse ones concocted. The main character himself is a swirl of ambiguity: son-in-law of Nevuchadnezzar, he is ruler over the entire world and yet powerless in the face of his wife. He promotes Haman, allows evil to dominate, but ultimately quells it. **Good or bad? Weak or powerful?** Opposites weave in and out of each other, creating a tapestry of contradiction.

The Hologram Effect

As we consider the events of the Megillah, we can try to categorize them as acts that concealed Hashem's hand, or those which revealed it.

Let's see what happens:

To start, let's take the promotion and rise of Haman. It seems clear that this was an act

of hester, concealment. A threat of genocide hung over klal Yisrael. But let's look at it from a different angle. The Jews had strayed, descended to a space of spiritual inertia. They needed a wake-up call. Haman's decree was one of the most effective alarm clocks in our history. So what looked like an act of hester panim, of concealment of Hashem's endless goodness **turns out to be a revelation, as He shepherds us towards a renewed closeness with Him**—and ultimately, the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash.

What about Vashti? Her downfall could be viewed as an act of hester, concealment. After all, this is what tore Esther away from Mordechai, married her to a pagan king, and forced her to live a tragic double life. **But let's look again. Perhaps it was an act of gilui, revelation.** After all, Chazal tell us that she died as a punishment for making Jewish girls work on Shabbos. Her downfall then, was a fitting punishment. And more. It was only because Esther was in the palace that she was able to intervene and revoke the decree against the Jews. *Conceal or reveal? Gilui or hester?*

It's almost like the events in the Megillah are like a hologram. Turn it to one angle and one picture appears. Tilt it in a different direction, **and there's another picture entirely.** As we read the Megillah, we're presented with a constant challenge: can we look at a narrative of cause and effect and see a deeper layer? Can we hold the paradox of gilui and hester?

And there's a profound reason for this challenge.

The Gift of Me

To understand this, let's think about a common scenario. Daughter is in camp, and parents send a care package. It's big. All her bunkmates gather around as she unseals the box and opens the flaps. They all peer, big-eyed, as she takes out her treasure. Candy, but the really good stuff. A scented moisturizer. Cozy socks for cold nights. A cute sweater that she's been wanting for a while.

"Whoa," one of her friends comments. **"You have good parents. They really love you."**

The girl smiles and nods, but inside she answers. *You think this shows how much they love me? This is nothing. If you think this measures it, you're very wrong. I know how much they really love me.* And she thinks about **sitting in the kitchen, doing her homework, feeling her mother's care** as she chatters about her day.

The package is a gilui, a revelation of her parents' love. But it's also a hester, a concealment.

Because her parents' love is far, far deeper than can be expressed by candy and socks, even the good type. And even the feeling that the girl has when sitting in the kitchen has the hologram effect. Yes, it's an experience of love. **But it also conceals how very much deeper that love extends.**

In fact, it's likely that the daughter will never know just how far her parents' love goes—because while each layer reveals that love, in relation to the breadth and depth and intensity of that love, it's an act of concealment.

With this in mind, let's look at **two ways that Hakadosh Baruch Hu interacts with the world**, as described by the Ramchal in Daas Tevunos.

Two Forms of Hashgacha

The first way Hashem operates in the world is through **midah k'neged midah**. We learned this at Yetzias Mitzrayim, when the Egyptians were punished for their torturous treatment of klal Yisrael. We stood at Har Sinai and accepted the Torah, and with it the premise that there are mitzvos, which are rewarded, and aveiros that are punished. The world is not random. There are expectations and accountability.

This makes sense to us.

But there's a deeper mode of operation, explains the Ramchal. He calls this **hanhagas Hayichud**. What does this mean? That there is a great master plan for all creation. It began with the creation of the world and will end at the final redemption, and it is a plan that must take us through darkness and agony but that will ultimately be a shining revelation of Hashem's oneness. Each individual person plays a part in this plan, **for we all contain within ourselves a spark of Hashem's light**. While our lives may twist and turn into places we don't expect and maybe don't even want, ultimately, Hashem is shepherding us, guarding our spark of light and ensuring that it endures and grows.

As we travel this pathway, both individually and as a nation, we are bewildered by the hester, by the concealment of Hashem's hand. In the words of the Ramchal (Daas Tevunos pp.45, section

54): "We have no understanding of Hashem's actions, **we see what plays out in the world but the inner purpose is hidden...**[though what happens in the world can fluctuate and change] the inner aspect is a constant: only good and not evil at all. But this is certainly not seen or understood now." And this concealment, this lack of understanding, he writes elsewhere can cause "our hearts to be stormy and turbulent" (Daas Tevunos 170).

In this mode of *hashgacha*, we don't see the hand of Hashem, only the pain of darkness and confusion.

The Revelation of Purim

One way of looking at the Purim story, the *Sifsei Chaim* points out, is **through the lens of reward and punishment**. The Jews messed up, feasting at the orgy of Achashveirosh. They were punished with the rise of Haman. They did Teshuvah and were saved.

But looking at it through this lens misses the point of the story. Rather than revealing the deeper meaning, it conceals it. **So what is the deeper meaning?**

The Jews exited from the Purim story not just cleansed from their sin, but qualitatively different.

They were **living in a time of concealment**. They had lost the Beis Hamikdash. The light of prophecy was flickering and fading, soon to be extinguished entirely (in fact, the Midrash tells us that Haman killed Hasach, who was Doniel,

one of the last of the prophets). They were far from the family home, exiled from Eretz Yisrael.

In fact, these were the exact arguments that Haman used to persuade Achashveirosh that his plan of genocide was viable. Don't start with the Jews, Achashverosh warned Haman. And Haman argued back: Yes, but they are no longer in their land and so have **forfeited direct hashgacha pratis**. And the Beis Hamikdash has gone, so there is no longer a direct connection.

But they only looked at the surface. And the surface may show where the Jews are now located and perhaps even their spiritual estrangement from the Torah and each other. But what reveals also conceals. It concealed **the immutable connection with Hashem. It concealed the deeper level of hashgachah—hanhagas hayichud**. That Hashem loves and cares for every single one of His children and He will never allow them to be destroyed.

Purim can be looked at as a story of crime and punishment, the Sifsei Chaim explains. But that would be a hester, because the real revelation is the deeper level of hashgacha that accompanies us into exile, **that holds us in moments of darkness**, and that loves us even when we are unworthy of that love.

In fact, this unconditional love is echoed again and again in Esther's preparations to meet Achashveirosh. At the moment when she enters his great chamber, her ruach hakodesh disappears. It seems like her spiritual attainments—achieved after three long days of fasting and prayer—have evaporated. But this

is the point. Hashem was preparing to save klal Yisrael not from His operational mode of crime and punishment. He wanted to show them the level of yichud, **of unconditional love**.

It is a mode that is also called *matnas chinam*, a free gift—and is echoed in Esther's word: *Im matzasi chen b'einecha*—If I find chein, the gift of grace, then save me. Not because we may or may not be worthy. But because You want to give us **a glimpse of the endless love that You have for Your nation**. A love that endures even when the Beis Hamikdash is ashes and they wander the diaspora, searching for some sign that You are with them.

The Ultimate Revelation

The climax of the Purim story comes as the Jews **reaccept the Torah upon themselves**. Kabbalas HaTorah part one was an acceptance of responsibility, obligation, accountability. The mountain was held over their heads, as they contemplated how their actions could sustain or destroy the world.

The second kabbalas haTorah, though, was qualitatively different. It was an understanding of a bond with Hashem and the Torah that takes place deep in our hearts. Even at times of concealment, when we feel alone or torn apart or anxious or wary from life's battles—**we are connected**. We are not just Hashem's servants, we are His children. There is a bedrock of love that is deeper than anything else. We simply need to keep peeling off the layers so that we can find it.

Purim taught us—for all generations—how to look for Hashem when He’s hiding. It imprinted the Jewish soul with the knowledge that Hashem is here with us, in galus, and our mistakes and our distance and **all of the messiness of our lives and inner conflicts will never touch that love**. It is a love that shepherds us through the process that will bring out our individual sparks of light. And it is for this reason that Purim will never be annulled, even in the great, bright light of the Final Redemption (Brachos 12b).

Moshe’s Legacy

Adar, Haman told Achashveirosh, was an auspicious time to implement a plan against the Jews. Why? Because it was in this month that Moshe Rabbeinu was niftar. Moshe Rabbeinu had a special spiritual power that would protect the Jews, and Haman needed for that power to be diminished, leaving a crack in the Jew’s spiritual armor. **What was the connection with Moshe Rabbeinu?** Why did Haman wait for a diminution of his power?

After the incredible revelation of Kabbalas HaTorah, the Jews crashed into the sin of the cheit ha’egel. They danced around a golden calf, wanting some level of intermediary between them and Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The Midrash Tanchuma (Va’eschanan 3:1) relates:

As Moshe Rabbeinu davened for Hashem to forgive His people, Hashem showed Moshe a treasury. There were the individual treasure chests of each of the tzaddikim, through each generation, according to the individual’s deeds.

And then there was a great chest in the center, bigger than all the rest, that contained all the good deeds of all the people. “To whom does this belong?” Moshe asked Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Hashem answered: “Those who have good deeds, I pay him from his treasure. **And as for those who don’t have good deeds, I give him a free gift, from this great chest.**”

Matnas chinam. Moshe Rabbeinu brought the Torah down to klal Yisrael—a Torah that gives us clear boundaries and directives. There are commandments and there is reward and there is punishment. But Moshe also brought another element into the world. Even if you turn your back on Hashem, **He is waiting for you, ready to receive you into His arms. Matnas chinam. A gift from a parent to a child, just because.** For no reason other than the unbreakable, untouchable bond. Haman knew that he had to wait until this spiritual energy had waned, but he made a mistake—Moshe Rabbeinu may have died in Adar but he was also born then. The gifts that he brought into the world would never fade away.

No wonder, then, that on Purim we enter into the sphere of *matnas chinam*. We relate to the world from a place of love. We give people tzedakah without checking their credentials or asking whether or not they are deserving. We send mishloach manos, giving even when people don’t need. We look at others and **see through the costumes and the façade, and relate to each other** as a precious, beloved child of Hashem, an extra sister or brother. And above all, we look through the confusion of life, through the concealment and catch a

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glimpse of what is revealed: **Hashem's endless love, accompanying us through dark times and light, through sorrow and confusion and joy and longing, to bring us back home, to His loving embrace.**

This Purim, may we all be *zocheh* to find the

revelation in the concealment, and, too, the concealment within the revelation. May we feel Hashem's loving presence, guiding us through the pathways of our lives, **so that we can live with a consciousness of His belief in us and our unbreakable bond.**

Sincerely,
Mrs. Faigie Zelcer

