

THE LORD OF THE RING



לֹא אֵלֹהִים כְּמִצְרַיִם וְעַתָּה יֵשׁוּעָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִיְהוָה

What's with all the masks on Purim? Are we trying to hide something?

In order to understand this we need to explore the concepts behind Purim, as well as miracles in general.

Let's take a look at the following two scenarios:

Scenario A: You are hiking on a mountain when suddenly the ground beneath you gives away and you find yourself plummeting down a 5000 foot drop. You manage to grab a little root sticking out of the side of the mountain, but you watch with dread as it slowly starts breaking. As you watch your life pass before your eyes in high speed and hi-def, something incredible happens. You see a rope hanging from the top of the cliff. You quickly grab hold of it and you are lifted up to safety. As you catch your breath, you ask the guy with the rope what he was doing there. He says that he just happened to be practicing rope-throwing in that exact spot, and he didn't even realize that you had fallen off the cliff until he felt a tug on the rope.

Scenario B: You are hiking on a mountain when suddenly the ground beneath you gives away and you find yourself plummeting down a 5000 foot drop. You manage to grab a little root sticking out of the side of the mountain, but you watch with dread as it slowly starts breaking. As you watch your life pass before your eyes in high speed and hi-def, something incredible happens. You levitate into the air until you are above the mountain; you then slowly descend for a picture perfect landing.

Is there a difference between these two miraculous events?

In scenario A, as incredible as it is, no laws of physics were broken. There is no physical reason why that couldn't happen. What's incredible is that this *particular thing* happened at this *particular moment*, which statistically is beyond anything anyone would consider reasonable. This is called a "hidden miracle". It is Hashem hidden in the laws of nature.

Scenario B is a revealed miracle (or open miracle). A law of physics is broken. Nature is temporarily pushed aside and we get a glimpse of the One behind the scenes.

The Jewish year starts off with Pesach, which is the holiday of open miracles; miracles through which it was clear to all that Hashem is running the world. But it ends with a very different kind of holiday - Purim - a holiday in which there were no open miracles, only a lot of seemingly random coincidences.



The Gemara explains why Purim is always in the second Adar:

מסמך גאולה לגאולה עדיף

In order to keep one redemption (purim) near the other (pesach).

Pesach and Purim always need to be near each other so that we recognize that they are both just as miraculous, it's just that on Purim it was hidden behind nature.

THE NAME OF THE BOOK OF PURIM IS MEGILLAT ESTHER, WHICH LITERALLY MEANS "THE SCROLL OF ESTHER". BUT THESE WORDS HAVE A DEEPER MEANING AS WELL. THE WORD "MEGILLAH" CAN ALSO MEAN "TO REVEAL", AND THE WORD "ESTHER" MEANS "HIDDEN", SO IT CAN ALSO BE READ AS "REVEALING THE HIDDEN". WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT PURIM IS ABOUT - REVEALING THE HIDDEN HAND OF HASHEM.

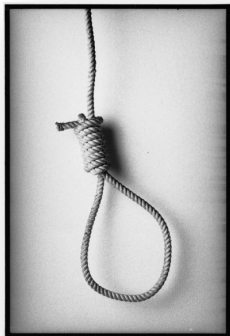
Let's take a look at the "natural coincidences" in the Purim story:

- *King Achashveirosh, in his drunken anger sent his queen to her death, setting the stage for a national search for a new queen.*
- *Esther, who unbeknownst to the king, was a Jew, was chosen to replace Vashti thereby putting her in the position to save her people from extermination.*
- *Mordechai, the leader of the Jews just happened to overhear two guards planning to assassinate the king, since Mordechai "coincidentally" understood the foreign language they spoke (he was one of the Men of the Great Assembly, and as such had to understand all 70 languages spoken at the time). He told this information to the king who had the guards executed, and recorded the incident in his book of chronicles.*
- *The king couldn't sleep one night and requests for his book of chronicles to be read to him. It just happens to open to the incident of Mordechai saving the king's life.*
- *When Esther made a party to which she invited the king and Haman, the instigator of the plot to kill the Jews, the king stormed out in fury, only to return when Haman was pleading for his life in a way that the king just happened to interpret as Haman's inappropriate interest in the Queen, thereby sealing Haman's fate.*

There is something even more incredible that happens in the Purim story. Not only does Hashem arrange from behind the scenes for things to work out to the benefit of the Jews, but He does it through the actions of Haman himself. Everything that Haman tried to do in order to kill Mordechai and the Jews ended up causing his own demise!

1. The Megillah describes (5,14) - quote - that Haman built a huge tree, 50 amos tall. This tree could be seen from anywhere in Shushan. The Vilna Gaon (quote) explains this is part of the hidden miracle: During the second party when Esther accuses Haman of being the evil one who is trying to wipe out her nation, one of

the servants points to this tree and says- quote - "And this is the tree that Haman set up, and planned to use to kill Mordechai, who spoke well of the king!" The Vilna Gaon writes, "aino domeh shmiah l'riyah." Seeing the tree had more of an impact than just hearing about it. When Achashverosh saw this tree, Haman's fate was clinched. Haman digs his own grave. This is a hidden miracle. Haman decided to build such a tall tree, and the fact that the tree was so tall came back to haunt Haman later on.



2. At the peak of his power, Haman decided it was time to kill Mordechai. Haman goes to the king in middle of the night to inform him that he wants Mordechai killed. He didn't want to wait until the morning because he wanted to make sure that the king would have Mordechai hanged before other things came up. On that night, the king cannot sleep. That is a medium-sized "coincidence". When the king cannot sleep, they read to him from the king's personal diary to help him calm down and fall back asleep. And as they are reading, they read about the fact that Mordechai had saved the king's life *five years earlier* and he had never been rewarded. At that moment who knocks on the palace doors? Haman - with a request to kill the very man the king had just heard had saved his life!

This is an incredible "coincidence." This is the ultimate hidden miracle in the *megillah*, that suddenly on the very night that Haman is on his way to have Mordechai killed they read to the king about Mordechai saving the king's life. This could have been read about and remembered at any point for the rest of history - at any point during Mordechai's life, or at any point during the king's life.

3. Haman's goal in killing the Jews was to thwart their plan of returning to Israel and rebuilding the second temple. The entire story of Purim led to Queen Esther being in a position to influence the politics of Babylon and further the process of the rebuilding of the second temple. Her son was Darius who allowed the Jews to return to Israel and start rebuilding the temple. Who had caused Esther to be in power? None other than Haman! He was the minister "Memuchan" who advised the king to execute Vashti thereby enabling Esther to be chosen in her place.

Hashem's name – אלהים , has the same gematria (numerical equivalent) as הטבע - nature. In the story of Purim Hashem is working behind the mask of Nature. The word for nature - "Teva" comes from the word "Tibua" which means an impression. There is a word used very often in the megillah that has the same root - *tabaat*. A *tabaat* is a signet ring. It is called this because of the *tibua*, impression, that it makes on another surface. Nature is God's stamp on the universe; if you know how to read it you will recognize that He is the one behind it.



וַיִּסַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת טַבְעָתוֹ

And the king removed his "*tabaat*" (ring)

The Gemara teaches us that whenever it says "The King" in the megillah it can also be referring to the King of the World - Hashem. This verse can also be read as "and the King removed nature". At this point in the story, when the king took off his ring and handed it to Mordechai, anyone with half a brain was able to see that Hashem was the one running the show.

The royal signet begins on Achashveirosh's finger. When Haman convinces him to wipe out the Jewish people, the ring passes to Haman's hand. The decree to kill the Jews was signed with that same signet ring, indicating the shift in *teva*, nature, toward elimination of the Jews. Finally, after Haman's demise, the king takes the ring from the hand of Haman and places it on Mordechai's. The edict permitting the Jews to seek vengeance against their enemies is also signed with same *tabaat*, ring.

Throughout the Megillah, the "*tabaat*" (nature) seemed to be in Haman's hand - in his favor. But ultimately Hashem is the one who controls the natural and He will ensure that everything turns out for the best.

To the discriminating eye, *teva* is nothing more than Hashem's fingerprint or stamp on this world. When a situation appears as bleak as the threat in the Purim story, instead of wasting our time trying to manipulate the natural variables to our advantage, we can turn to the One behind the ultimate mask, with the confidence that He is the Master of nature; the "Lord of the Ring".

Can you unmask Hashem? Can you find something that you thought was a coincidence, or something that at the time you thought was negative, which you ultimately saw was for the good?

GO AHEAD. TAKE THE #UNMASKEDCHALLENGE.



**“ONE KING TO RULE US ALL,
WITH ONE RING WE CAN FIND HIM”**

(Translation of the Elvish script on the cover)