



## Esther Panim: What's in a Name

### Topic

Purim

### Grade Level(s)

All

### Goals for the Lesson/Activity

#### Students will

- Be able to explain that God's name does not appear in *Megillat Esther* (the Scroll of Esther)
- Be able to explain that אֶסְתֵּר (Esther) is a play on הֶסְתֵּיר (*hesteir*), the Hebrew word for secret or hiddenness
- Reflect on where we find hidden miracles

### Materials needed

- Paper
- Pencils, Pens

### Background for Teachers

God's name does not appear in *Megillat Esther*. While this might seem to indicate that the Jewish People's victory over Haman was accomplished through purely human means, close reading of the narrative might indicate otherwise.

*Megillat Esther* tells us that Mordechai's niece is "Hadassah, that is Esther..." (*Megillat Esther* 2:7). Hadassah is the Hebrew name. Esther is a Persianized version of the name. However, אֶסְתֵּר is also a pun on the word הֶסְתֵּיר, meaning "secret" or "hidden." Thus, Esther represents something hidden, which could be God's presence in this narrative (Talmud Bavli, Tractate Chullin 139b). \*

Furthermore, Mordechai informs Esther that the Jewish People will be saved with or without her help. This is an implication that God will save the Jewish People regardless of Esther's involvement (*Megillat Esther* 4:14). Esther, though, has the opportunity to be the person through whom God acts to save the Jewish People.

\* Please note that this hiddenness could also be understood to refer to how she hides her Jewish identity from King Ahasuerus.



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### Description of Activities

1. Distribute paper and writing implements to students.
2. Ask students to write their full names on their paper.
3. Ask students to find words hidden among the letters in their names. [For example Sarah Stein might find “she,” “shine,” and “hire.”]
4. When students have finished, ask them to share some of the things that they found hidden in themselves. Do these hidden words reveal anything about themselves?
5. Write the words אֶסְתֵּר and הֶסְתֵּר on the board. Ask students to say the words with you.
6. Explain that אֶסְתֵּר is Queen Esther from *Megillat Esther* while הֶסְתֵּר means hiddenness. Queen Esther's name is a pun on the word הֶסְתֵּר.
7. Explain that God's name does not appear in *Megillat Esther*.
8. Ask students where they can find hidden miracles in the Purim narrative. Where might we be able to find God even though we do not see God explicitly?
  - a. Some other leading questions you might want to ask include:
    - i. How does Esther come to be the queen?
    - ii. What does Mordechai mean when he tells Esther that the Jewish People will be saved even without her?
    - iii. How is Queen Esther able to safely enter King Ahasuerus' inner court without being invited?
    - iv. How are the Jews, who are a minority in the kingdom, able to defeat all the people who attacked them?
9. Ask students where we can find God today even though we do not see God explicitly.
  - a. You might want to go for a walk outside or around the building and ask where they can see God's presence even though they cannot see God (i.e. Where is God hiding?)



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### Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

#### ***For learners who need more assistance***

- Use English letters instead of Hebrew letters for Esther's name and for *Hesteir*.
- On the board, write some common words that students might be able to find in their names.

#### ***For learners who need extension opportunities***

- Students look for small words in their Hebrew names.
- Students write hidden-miracle poetry.