

# Weekly Teaching

February 23, 2018

*This week's teaching is provided by Rabbi Chaya Bender.*

*Shabbat Shalom,*

*Rabbi Mitch*

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## **(Hidden) FaceTiming with God: A Purim Analogy**

It is logistically challenging to FaceTime with my 5-year-old sister, Hazel.

Often when my father hands her the phone, she makes a silly face and informs me that while she does love me, she is in the middle of watching “My Little Ponies” and would like to resume her program. Other times, she giddily steals the phone and runs around the house showing me this and that, never quite getting the object in the view of the camera. Of course, when I have called too close to bed time, my father’s “Hazel, do you want to talk to your sister?” has been answered with a shriek of “NO!”

While it is hard to FaceTime with my sister, those moments of connection are so heartwarming. I cherish the moments when we connect, even if just for a minute.

I imagine this is how God must feel when trying to get in touch with God’s people.

Sometimes God’s people are just too busy to talk, or are caught up in the commotion of everyday living. And yes, sometimes the answer to “Do you want to talk to God right now?” is “NO!”

It must be hard for God to “FaceTime” with people like that and it is especially hard to connect when God’s face is hidden.

God’s name is not mentioned in the Book of Esther. Since not having God mentioned in a book of the Bible is a rarity, the Rabbis took that to mean that God’s face is purposely hidden. This symbolizes the lack of faith of the Jewish people and foreshadows calamities that will befall them. As it says in Deuteronomy 31:17:

*I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them. They will be devoured, and plagued by many evils that will distress them, and will say, ‘Do we not suffer because God has left us?’”*

Despite this, the Jews in Shushan were still in connection with God, actively seeking to uncover God’s face. Even though the Jews could have easily fallen into the hands of the evil Haman, they stubbornly refused to give up.

In fact, it was during this time — in Persia, in exile, in a time of great crisis, without the clear guidance from God — that the Jews made their greatest declaration of faith.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

*“[...]The real test of faith came when God was hidden [...]The rabbis suggested that the name Esther is an allusion to the phrase haster astir et panai, ‘I will surely hide My face.’ The book relates the first warrant for genocide against the Jewish people. That Jews remained Jews under*

*such conditions was proof positive that they did indeed re-affirm the covenant. Obstinate in their disbelief during much of the biblical era, they became obstinate in their belief ever afterward. Faced with God's presence, they disobeyed God. Confronted with God's absence, they stayed faithful to God. That is the paradox of the stiff-necked people."*

According to Rabbi Sacks, the Jews, paradoxically, only sought God out because God's face was hidden. Instead of attributing the lack of God's presence to the divine retribution mentioned in Deuteronomy, they took it upon themselves to make the first step — to pick up the phone, so to speak.

I am still waiting for Hazel to FaceTime me first, but I am sure that moment will make my heart overflow with love. So too, I imagine must be the way God feels when God's children take the first step toward connection — whether it be to save an entire nation, or through smaller, every day acts of kindness.