BEYOND THE HINTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Ya'akov dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. (Bereishis 37:1)

When Bag Bag said that everything is in the Torah, he wasn't exaggerating. He was just reiterating what the Midrash says, that God used the Torah as a blueprint for Creation. All potential history, by definition, must be in the Torah somewhere and on some level.

This may be difficult to see on the simple level of the words and stories themselves. How many times do the words "Purim" or "Chanukah" appear anywhere in the Torah, at least in any obvious way? Zero. Fortunately, Pshat is only the entry level of Torah. There are three more far deeper levels of Torah learning once inside.

For example, it says later in the Torah:

"I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and—Anochi haster astir—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?' " (Devarim 31:17)

The end letters [Anochi haster astir] have the gematria of "Haman." This is what the rabbis learn in Chullin (139b), that "Anochi haster astir" hints to Esther.

There are many other hints to the holiday of Purim in the Torah. In fact, one has to do with the story of Yosef and his brothers, as the Talmud explains:

"To all of them he gave to each man changes of clothing, but to Binyomin he gave five changes of clothing" (Bereishis 44:22). Is it possible that this righteous person could commit the very mistake from which he himself had suffered? . . . Rebi Binyomin bar Yafes said: "He hinted to him that a descendant would come from him who would go before a king in five royal garments, as it says, 'Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue . . .' (Esther 8:15)." (Megillah 16a)

Assuming that this was Yosef's intention in giving his younger brother the extra clothing, the question becomes, why? What point was Yosef making in doing this, and why then? What connection was there between that moment in history and the one that resulted in Mordechai's rise to power thousands of years later?

It's a good question—for Purim. What about Chanukah? To begin with, there are the numbers 25 and 36, and both are Chanukah numbers. Chanukah is the only Jewish holiday to begin on the 25th day

of a month, a number associated with the special light—Ohr HaGanuz—with which God made Creation. We light 36 candles over the course of the eight days that follow, a number also associated with the Ohr HaGanuz, and rectifying mankind:

God called out to the man and said to him, "Ayekah—Where are you?" (Bereishis 3:9)

The word "ayekah" is meant only as a gematria equalling [Aleph-Yud-Chof-Heh, or, 1+10+20+5, which totals] 36. (Eichah Zuta 1:1)

Not only this, but Ya'akov was away from home for a total of 36 years. Rachel died in last week's parsha at the age of 36, and the gematria of "Leah" is also 36. After fighting with the angel, it says:

God said to Ya'akov, "For endangering yourself for a small container, I Myself will repay your children with a small container to the Chashmonaim!" (Midrash Tzeidah LaDerech, Maharil)

There are many, some more remarkable than others. For example, at the end of next week's parsha, after the brothers have returned to Egypt for more food, Yosef commands:

"Slay an animal and prepare it, because these men shall dine with me at noon." (Bereishis 43:16)

There is nothing special about these English words, at least in terms of a hint to Chanukah. The Hebrew, "utevo'ach tevach vehachein," is different. The words "utevo'ach tevach" have the numerical value of 44, the number of candles, including the shamashim, kindled throughout the eight days of Chanukah. Also, the last five letters, beginning with the Ches of "tevach" and ending with the Nun of "vehachein" are the same letters as "Chanukah" (Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu).

The truth is, the hints to Chanukah are all over the Torah, even going back to Adam HaRishon when God asked him, "Ayekah." If you want to see all of of them and what they mean, read my book, "The Light of 36," or, "Chanukah Lite" (orderable online). The latter is also in audio format. The question for now is, what's the point? What is the reason the Torah alludes to holidays that didn't even make it into the Torah, making them rabbinically established holidays only?

The answer is that, unlike the rest of the Torah holidays, Purim and Chanukah were works in progress until they actually entered history in an obvious way. The Rabbis may have established them, but their roots go back to Creation and are the undercurrent for all of history.

It's like life in general. All of our lives are works in progress. We have plans to be something from an early age, but don't really know what that "something" will end up being by the time we're "finished." It might be true in some cases that what a person is at the age of 70 is what he planned to be at the age of seven. To assume that this will be the case while still seven however would be ridiculous and in most cases, a futile attempt at controlling the future.

Part of the problem is that we just don't know who we are at the age of seven, seventeen, or even seventy. We get to know ourselves better as we go along, hopefully. But we have potential that we don't know about until life circumstances reveal it, and that is rarely something we can predict or

control. Marriage alone can radically change the course of one's life.

How many times though do people think to themselves, "This is the real me . . ." or, "this is my ideal life," only to find out years later that it wasn't. It just seemed that way at the time. Or life itself just did not permit us to remain doing the same thing or living the same way. War is one of the most intense examples of this.

Both Purim and Chanukah represent something in history that had to happen. Ever since God first spoke Creation into existence, their contributions to the development of history and mankind were inevitable. Not right way though, and not even by the time of the close of the Torah. At the right time, after a certain passage of time and historical events, they were destined to make their way from the realm of the hidden to that of the revealed.

It's not that they could not have been holidays earlier. The Talmud teaches that there are two possible times for redemption: early and at the last possible moment (Sanhedrin 98a). It will all depend upon the state of mankind at the potential moment, and specifically that of the Jewish people. An early redemption takes a special merit. A last-moment redemption takes history to run out of time. Then, redemption comes with a bang, and not one that usually starts out in favor of the Jewish people.

The allusions to Purim and Chanukah in the Torah are not only that. They were potential "early" times for Purim to become a holiday, or Chanukah. When Yosef gave the five pieces of clothing to Binyomin, he was not just hinting to a future event. He was hoping that perhaps, at that time, everything was in place to make Purim a reality in his time, without having to go through all the tzuris caused by Haman and Achashveros.

The same is true of all the Chanukah hints. They are also not just allusions to future events, but actual Chanukah moments, times in history during which something Chanukah-related happened, or could have happened. Had all the conditions been fulfilled at that time, the Chanukah contribution to history would have occurred then.

If these rabbinical holidays had come early, would they have still resulted in specially held days? Not necessarily, the same way that an early redemption would be smooth and historically seamless. When it comes to "Achishenah," a hastened redemption, everything is spiritually the way it has to be already. There is no need for a dramatic conclusion to history.

When it comes to "B'ittah," on the other hand, the last-minute redemption, the world will not be the way it is ultimately supposed to be, and neither will the Jewish people. Subsequently history will require a dramatic end to right all the wrongs, and to rid the world of evil, and false understandings.

Both Purim and Chanukah, in the end, were "B'ittah" types of events. They did not come early, but at their last possible moment. As a result, they occurred in dramatic fashions, salvations from the clutches of impending destruction. As such they became national Jewish holidays to mark the

moment for future celebration, and to reveal the spiritual energy in the world at that time.