"A Finger, Am Hand, An Arm; Three Levels of Understanding G-d in History"

On this Great Sabbath it behooves us to reflect upon the essential meaning of the festival which it precedes and anticipates. Passover is, in reality, a festive, elaborate and profound history lesson. By symbol and speech, we relate the past of Israel from its idolatrous beginnings with Terah, father of Abraham, through its classical era which follows the crisis of the crossing of the Red Sea. The history which we relate, however, is more than a sequence of facts. It is, rather, the unfolding of a Divine drama. There is nothing fortuitous about the history of the Jew; his past is a pattern, his present a plan, his future - a faith that G-d will, in His own mysterious way, continue to guide him through the labyrinthian channels of history. It is G-d, not chance, who is the moving and directing power in history.

Not everyone, however, can grasp this Divine element in history equally well. Some people are entirely oblivious to pulse-beat of G-d as He moves through time. Others can detect only so much; others much more. And even on each individual level of understanding, there are several ways of looking at and appreciating G-d's intervention in the affairs of Man.

In the story of Passover, the holiday dedicated to understanding the role of G-d in History, as reflected in the Bible and in the Haggada, we find references to three such levels of understanding. And each is symbolized by what we speak of poetically as the parts of G-d a bedy. They are the finger, the hand and the arm of G-d; the etzbah elokim, yad ha'chazaka, zroa netuyah. They represent, respectively, the lower, middle and higher forms of perceiving G-d as He reveals Himself in the life of a people.

The finger is that organ which is used for pointing or indicating. It is the finger of G-d which points to the future, awhich indicates His will, and which writes the true history of nations. Both Egyptian and Jew saw the finger of G-d. The difference is in how they saw it. For the finger of G-d and its handwriting can be perceived out of pain and destruction and catastrophe; and it can be understood from beauty and happiness and blessing.

1. The Egyptian magicians first recognized G-d's domination of the scene after the third plague, the kinim or gnats. It is only then that they become aware of the Finger of G-d:

a) because it causes a Plague.

b) it destroys his gods. The two previous plagues struck humans alone; thekinim strike animals as well, and animals were the Egyptian gods.

19:27 1191 c) it shows up his own inferiority. This was the first plague which the Egyptian magicians were not able to duplicate.

2. The Jew recognizes the Finger of G-d:

There are those moments when one can see more than the Finger of G-d active in history of mankind. He can recognize more than that - he sees the hand of G-d, the hand which molds and directs the tremendous forces which are the blood of history. Here too the Egyptian and the Jew see the hand from different points of view.

1. The Egyptian recognizes the hand of G-d in

יליני וז ז פורים לאלללי a) destruction and impoverishment:

2. b) The Jew, however, sees the Hand of G-d in:

a) Deliverance from Oppresion: PI) AN 3 UNIN 3 PSIN2 >>
b) Acceptance of the Penitent: PIZE 1278 20103131

c) Universal Charity: (13) in Fol 120 NI 37 AL AA) an Act of Faith: (NI) 77 DIL 7712

ee) Something which Leads to Faith: 1321 1 Chri 32 yinki 1320 21 Ali fine playi

arm of G-d, the Egyptian and the Jew part.

by the finger of G-d, the pointer or indicator, and by the hand of G-d, the molder and director of historical forces, so is there a greater and broader revelation of G-d symbolized by the arm of G-d, the zroa netuyah. The arm symbolizes power, and in this case the very source of those historical forces of which we speak. It is the zroa netuyah which gives impetus and

Mincha, Shabbos Hagadol 4/5/52

1. The Egyptian becomes aware of the Arm of G-d:

a) Only as a Strong-Arm: (Ezekiel 18).

An Egyptian, even if he be an aristocratic Egyptian, a Pharoah, can understand and appreciate and recognize the Arm of G-d only when it flexes its powerful muscles and strikes his own arm, breaking it hopelessly.

2. The Jew sees the arm of G-d from a different pair of national eyes:

a) The Arm Lovingly Cutstretched to Aid the Needy: (Isaiah 33).

power to all the great movements of the ages. And here too, in the revelation of the outstretched

The powerful yet kindly arms of G-d ready to embrace a suffering humanity.

In all levels of understanding, therefore, whether one can see only a finger, or as much as an arm, or a hand, or all of an arm, there are two ways of interpreting life: the Egyptian and the Jewish. And it is the basic Jewish optimism which has insured his survival

through all the vicissitudes which have befallen him. For the Jew is optimistic indeed; he tries to reach G-d through construction, not destruction; through prayer, not plague;

b) The Arm of Redemption: (10) 11352 PDAR ARM

through benediction, not malediction; through morality, not idolatry; through creativity, not calamity; through faith and charity and devotion and redemption.

In these days of catastrophic upheaval and eruption of unleashed historical forces, it is important for us to understand these events as the Jew should. Whether one can barely detect the finger of G-d, or whether he can grasp the hand of G-d, or whether he can catch a glimpse of the great artstretched arm of G-d, he must look at it Jewishly, never like an Egyptian.