



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Pesach / פסח

God's Long Arm Over Yerushalayim

One of the most overlooked as most perplexing parts of the Haggadah is the midrashic interpretation of the verse: "The Lord took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with a great manifestation, and with signs and wonders."¹ For example, on the phrase "with an outstretched arm," the haggadah comments: this refers to the sword, as it is said: "His sword was drawn, in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem."² The identity of this sword in the Pesach story is a point of much contention. The Egyptians were never punished through swords and the verse itself is taken from an episode that occurred a thousand years after the Jews left Mizrayim during the time of King Dovid.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik³ suggested that, as the prooftext indicates, the hagadah here refers to a much later event in our history. Divrei HaYamim describes that due to a sin of King Dovid, a plague befell the Jewish people. After Hashem tells the destroying angel to desist, Dovid looks up and sees the angel with an outstretched sword. Therefore, in context, this verse describes the situation at the end of a long and terrible plague.

Accordingly, the terms "outstretched arm" refers not only to the specific event of the exodus, but rather that God's arm has a long reach and protect the Jews throughout history. Retelling these post-Egypt events underscore Hashem's reach and active protection over the Jewish people. This, in turn, creates an obligation for us to express our gratitude to Hashem, for his providence over us beginning with the redemption from Egypt and continuing until today.

¹ Translations are from https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/661624/jewish/English-Haggadah.htm.

² Divrei HaYamim 1, 21:16

³ Har'erei Kedem Volume 2, Bi'urim on the Haggadah.



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Building off of Rav Soloveitchik's idea, it is no coincidence that the verse that expresses this idea centers on Yerushalayim. First, Hashem's providence focuses more on Yerushalayim than other locations. But perhaps more fundamentally, Yerushalayim is the symbol of God's outstretched arm. If one would zero in on various historical time periods then God's mighty hand over Yerushalayim would not be so apparent. However, from our perspective looking back, we can partially see how all of Yerushalayim's tumultuous history is part of God's long arm that is guiding the events of Yerushalayim's timelines.

Thus, in line with Rav Soloveitchik's conclusions, studying and contemplating Yerushalayim's unique history and understanding the "arm" of Hashem regarding the city, leads directly to an obligation to thank Hashem. May we merit to properly thank Hashem for all of the kindness he bestows upon us and upon his city, Yerushalayim.