



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center
for Values and Leadership

Passover, Redemption and Religious Freedom

A HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

Quotes and Questions for Your Seder Table

Every other nation known to humankind has been united because its members lived in the same place, spoke the same language, were part of the same culture. Jews alone, dispersed across continents, speaking different languages and participating in different cultures, have been bound together by a narrative, the Pesach narrative, which they tell in the same way on the same night. More than the Haggadah is the story of a people, Jews are the people of a story. *The Story of Stories, The Jonathan Sacks Haggadah, p.2*

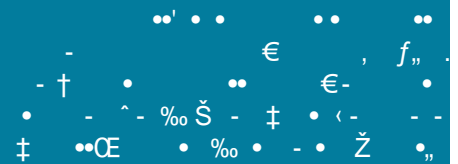
When do you feel most connected to global Jewry?

The Exodus narrative is not a simple story of good versus evil. It is a critique of the politics of power, empires, hierarchical societies and the division of populations into free human beings and slaves. *Covenag iC*

JOIN THIS CONVERSATION AT YOUR SEDER TABLE

Biblical Text:
Shemot
14:21–23

And Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea; and God caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And Bnei Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea...



What do you see in the artwork? How do you interpret the nature of redemption depicted in Tissot's work?

R. Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Shemot 14:16

God told Moses to lift up his rod and divide the sea before the children of Israel went forward. The Lord did not tell Moses to strike the sea. He told him to stretch out his hand toward the sea in the manner of And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven (Ex. 9:23). We know that the rod did not divide the sea but that from the moment that Moses stretched his hand toward the sea God caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind and the waters then split. For it is so written.

R. Jonathan Sacks, "The Divided Sea: Natural or Supernatural?," *Covenant and Conversation, Exodus*, p.104–106

The emphasis here is on the supernatural dimension of what happened. Water, which normally flows, stood upright. The sea parted to expose dry land. The laws of nature were suspended. Something happened for which there can be no scientific explanation. However, if we listen carefully, we can also hear a different note. Here there is not a sudden change in the behavior of water, with no apparent cause. God brings a wind that, in the course of several hours, drives the waters back... Viewed from this perspective, the events that took place could be described as follows: The Israelites had arrived at the Reed Sea at a point at which it was shallow. Possibly there was a ridge in the sea bed, normally covered by water, but occasionally—when, for example, a fierce east wind blows—exposed... We have here two ways of seeing the same events: one natural, the other supernatural. The supernatural explanation—that the waters stood upright—is immensely powerful, and so it entered Jewish memory. But the natural explanation is no less compelling.

R. Joseph Soloveitchik, *Emergence of Ethical Man*, p.187–188

The word 'miracle' in Hebrew does not possess the connotation of the supernatural. It has never been placed on the transcendental level. "Miracle" [Heb., *peleh, nes*] describes only an outstanding event which causes amazement... As we read the story of the Exodus from Egypt, we are impressed by the distinct tendency of the Bible to relate the events in natural terms. The frogs came out of the river when the Nile rose; the wind brought the locusts and split the sea... The Bible never emphasizes the unnaturalness of the events; only its intensity and force are emphasized... The miracle does not destroy the objective scientific nexus in itself, it only combines natural dynamics and historical purposefulness. Had the plague of the firstborn, for instance, occurred a year before or after the Exodus, it would not have been termed "with a strong hand" (*be-yad hazakah*)... On the night of Passover He appeared as the God of the cosmos acting along historical patterns... Miracle is simply a natural event which causes a historical metamorphosis. Whenever history is transfigured under the impact of [natural] cosmic dynamics, we encounter a miracle.

Your Observation Here

French painter, James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1836-1902, experienced a profound religious experience and became increasingly devout later in life. He began a series of religious paintings of the Christian Bible in 1885. After its acclaimed reception, he began to illustrate the Hebrew Bible and traveled to Palestine in 1896 to draw inspiration from landscapes where biblical stories were set. *The Waters are Divided*, one of his final paintings, captures the supreme miracle in the Exodus, the splitting of the sea.

James Tissot, "*The Waters are Divided*" (1902), The Jewish Museum, NYC

