

Prepared by Deb Kayman for West Side Minyan, 24 Mar 2007

Why put an orange on the seder plate?

Have you heard of this custom? What's it about?

The following chronology comes from Rebecca Alpert, 1997, in Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition.

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| Winter 1979 | Chabad House rebbetzin Hilda Langer is invited to speak to the Jewish Women's Group at UC Berkeley. Her topic: Women & Halakha. She is asked for her opinion about the place of lesbians in Judaism. Her answer: It's a small transgression, like eating bread during Passover. You shouldn't do it but, if you do, there are few consequences. |
| Spring 1979 | Recalling Langer's remarks, members of the Berkeley group decide to put a crust of bread on the seder plate. This is to show their solidarity with Jewish lesbians who are struggling to claim a place in Jewish life. |
| Early 1980s | New lesbian haggadot include bread on the seder plate, but the explanatory text says that this is a retort to an unnamed male rabbi who is said to have declared that "there is as much place for lesbians in Judaism as for leavened bread at the Seder table." |
| 1984 | <p>The women at Oberlin choose not to put bread on the seder plate; instead they leave an open space, marked 'makom,' to denote a sacred space where lesbians and other alienated Jews are welcome to enter.</p> <p>Others decide to use an orange instead of bread. In the 1990s Susannah Heschel claims this idea originated with her. At first, the orange represents lesbians; later it comes to represent gay men as well (DK adds: and, later still, bisexuals and transgendered persons; see <u>The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah</u> (c) 2002 Central Conference of American Rabbis).</p> <p>The legend continues to change. In another version, a man told a Jewish feminist that women rabbis had as much of a role in Judaism as oranges did on a seder plate, or that women had as much of a place on the bimah as oranges on a seder plate.</p> |

Discussion questions:

- Each version of the legend presents or implies a different viewpoint on bread at Passover. Characterize the respective viewpoints.
- Though all the versions have to do with belonging, each focuses on a different 'out-group' and a different 'villain' or 'oppressor.' Characterize these differences. What life experiences help to explain them?
- How do you feel about having something new & different, perhaps even shocking, added to the seder plate?
- Which addition do you prefer: the orange, the dedicated space, or the crust of bread?
- What other symbol, if any, would work better for you? Explain the reasons for your choice.