

## **Alternative Seder Symbols!**



### **1. The Orange**

Susannah Heschel introduced the ritual of having an orange on the Seder plate in her home in the 1980s as a sign of the fruitfulness the community enjoys when those who have traditionally been sidelined because of gender or sexuality are accepted into it. Over the years, as Heschel's custom spread throughout the Jewish community, a myth developed around it. The story went that she had added the orange to the seder plate after a man shouted at her that a woman belongs on the bimah (pulpit) as much as an orange on a seder plate!

However she writes about the first time she did it: "During the first part of the Seder, I asked everyone to take a segment of the orange, make the blessing over fruit, and eat it as a gesture of solidarity with Jewish lesbians and gay men, and others who are marginalized within the Jewish community...In addition, each orange segment had a few seeds that had to be spit out – a gesture of spitting out, repudiating the homophobia that poisons too many Jews."

### **2. Miriam's Cup**

A Miriam's Cup is a new ritual object that can be placed on the seder table beside the Cup of Elijah. Miriam's Cup is filled with water. It serves as a symbol of Miriam's Well, which was the source of water for the Israelites in the desert. Putting a Miriam's Cup on one's table is a way of making the seder more inclusive, and it is also a way of drawing attention to the importance of Miriam and the other women of the Exodus story - women who have sometimes been overlooked but about whom tradition says, "If it wasn't for the righteousness of the women of that generation we would not have been redeemed from Egypt" (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 9b).



There are many legends about Miriam's Well. It is said to have been a magical source of water that followed the Israelites for forty years because of the merit of Miriam. The waters of this well were healing and sustaining; a symbol of life. Thus Miriam's Cup is a symbol of all that sustains us through our own journeys, while Elijah's Cup is a symbol of a future Messianic time.

I have begun to suggest the introduction of a Serach's cup (we will learn more about Serach next week!) as like Elijah she entered Paradise alive. She also represents the handing on of *mesorah* or oral tradition that is so much a part of the seder.

### **3. The Olive**

In recent years an olive has been placed upon some seder tables. As a symbol of peace it represents our hopes for Israel, and for the world. Jewish law teaches us that we must not destroy trees in war. In Israel the military and settlers have destroyed many olive groves that were the livelihoods of Palestinians. However these olive groves were sometimes also being used by snipers to fire at Israelis. Thus the olive also represents the suffering that is experienced on both sides of the conflict in Israel, and for some reminds us that we must not be complacent about our freedom, when others are not free.

### **4. The Coconut**

"The coconut represents young closeted gay people," Gellis explains. "Even though they're sweet and tender-hearted on the inside, they're also stuck inside a hard shell. It's our way of remembering people who can't be with us because they're not out [of the closet] yet."



[http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/an\\_old\\_story\\_finds\\_new\\_life\\_in\\_lgb\\_t\\_haggadah\\_20080418](http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/an_old_story_finds_new_life_in_lgb_t_haggadah_20080418)

### **5. Chocolate and Coffee beans**

The are used on some seder plates as part of a campaign by Fair Trade Judaica to highlight Jewish concern for forced child labour in those industries, particularly as we celebrate our own freedom on Pesach.

### **6. Tomato**

Rabbis For Human Rights North America have suggested these because they are often produced in the US by badly paid immigrant workers, whose rights also need protecting.

### **7. Artichoke**

Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael suggests this prickly vegetable with the soft heart for the interfaith-friendly seder plate.

"Like the artichoke, which has thistles protecting its heart, the Jewish people have been thorny about this question of interfaith marriage. Let this artichoke on the seder plate tonight stand for the wisdom of God's creation in making the Jewish people a population able to absorb many elements and cultures throughout the centuries--yet still remain Jewish" she writes on Interfaithfamily.com

### **8. Potato Peel**

Said to represent either the dearth of food available to victims in the Shoah, considered a treat by some camp inmates, we regularly throw peelings away,

## **Vegetarians**

"The eating of the Paschal lamb is no longer required now that the Temple is not standing. One is required to commemorate this act, not participate in it. The late Dayan Feldman stated that mushrooms, which have a fleshy appearance can be used on the Seder plate to commemorate the Paschal lamb. Rabbi Huna, a Talmudic sage, stated that a beet can be used for the same purpose. (Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 114b) In a personal note to the author, Rabbi David Rosen pointed out that the objects on the seder plate are symbolic, and hence there is no sin in improvising. He suggested that vegans use a beet to represent the Paschal offering (instead of a shank bone), and a mushroom to represent the Festive offering (instead of an egg)."

<http://jewishveg.com/faq29.html>

Many vegetarians (those who use the Haggadot of Robert and Roberta Kalechofsky) use a combination of "dry" barley or wheat (wrapped in plastic wrap) along with olives and grapes. This second option comes with a modern midrash as its prooftext:

"As vegetarians, in place of the shankbone, we place olives, grapes, and grains of unfermented barley, which symbolize the commandments of compassion for the oppressed, to be found in the Bible. We use olives to commemorate the commandment to leave the second shaking of the olive trees for the poor, we use grapes to commemorate the commandment to leave the second shaking of the grapevines for the poor (Deuteronomy 24:20), and we use grains of unfermented barley (or other unleavened or unfermented grains), to commemorate the commandment not to muzzle the ox when it treads out the corn in the fields (Deuteronomy 25:4), in other words, to recognize the natural appetites of the animal and not interfere with them. This commandment is considered to be the oldest extant concept of 'animal rights,' and enshrines the dignity and rights of the animal."

-- Haggadah for the Liberated Lamb (1985 [the next to last unnumbered page before the Seder begins], 1988) and Haggadah for the Vegetarian Family (1993).

[...]

A more common practice referred to among vegetarians is the use of a beet on their seder plate in place of a zeroa. The earliest reference to this I have found is in *The Jewish Catalog* (1973), page 142 in the sidebar:

"For vegetarians, who may object to using a lamb bone on the seder plate (as a remembrance of the paschal sacrifice): it is halakhically [legally] acceptable to use a broiled beet as a replacement." Those who use a beet refer to Pesachim 114b as their prooftext.

*Copyright 1999 by Rabbi Mark Hurvitz*

<http://davka.org/why/bejewish/vegeshankbone.html>

## **Worldwide seder customs**

- Some families from North Africa use spring onions for the Karpas and before they eat it they playfully hit each other with them as if they were Egyptian task-masters.
- In a family with Chasidic background, after the father breaks the Matsah he puts it in a napkin which he ties on to a stick. Then gets up from the table, puts the stick over his shoulder like Dick Whittington and walks round the table followed by the children and he says *Thus did our ancestors when they came out of Egypt.*
- A Sephardi family puts a piece of the Aphikomen in the back of their Haggadah and keeps it there till the following Pesach, some place it over the door frame for luck.
- The Seder Plate in Southern Italy, Sicily and Morocco - The Seder plate is brought to the Seder table with great ceremony. It would be covered with a beautiful scarf and the family would sing as the plate arrived at the table. Before it was set down, the Seder plate would be placed on a child's head and then rotated for everyone to see.
- The Seder Plate in Tunisia, Sicily and Sardinia – As the plate arrives at the table, the Seder leader sets it on the head of the Seder leader. The plate is then passed from person to person around the table – held for a moment on each head by a family member. The Seder begins in this manner to demonstrate that we were once slaves in Egypt and carried heavy burdens on our heads.
- Charoset for Anousim or Oppressed Jews – In Cuba where Jews have had difficulty practicing their religion, traditional fruits are often not available. Apples and nuts and dried fruit were impossible to find. So Cuban Jews created a recipe called "Charoset of the Oppressed." The mixture is basic and includes only matzah, honey, cinnamon and wine. Using this charoset at your Seder table will remind your family, especially the children, of the plight of Cuban Jews and all oppressed people around the world.

### **Further reading:**

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2011/04/11/3086829/using-the-seder-plate-as-a-call-to-action>

<http://www.sippingseder.com> (a seder based around alcoholic drinks to replace the seder symbols!)

<http://newvoices.org/2012/04/04/0158-2/> (a little risqué be warned!)

<http://jewishmag.com/122mag/passover-sephardic-traditions/passover-sephardic-traditions.htm> (Some interesting Sephardi and Mizrahi customs noted, only some included above).

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/an\\_old\\_story\\_finds\\_new\\_life\\_in\\_lgbt\\_haggadah\\_20080418](http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/an_old_story_finds_new_life_in_lgbt_haggadah_20080418) LGBT seder (including the coconut)