

My Jewish Anniversary: A Liberation Story

Contributed by [Haggadot](#)

Source: Love and Justice In Times of War Haggadah

by Stosh Cotler

I had danced for D before- a leather butch who came into my club with her old school, high femme wife and their entourage. That particular night, the Saturday before Passover, I sat with their crew after my table dance for D, and was shocked when D's lover started talking about Seder arrangements. Immediately, I outed myself as a Jew, which caused a huge burst of excitement at the table- imagine the odds, not only of randomly running into other Jews in a goyim-dominated city like Portland, but of meeting freaky Jews at a sex club. It was beautiful. I was invited to their Seder, and I accepted.

A few days later I wasn't so sure about my decision. A Seder, after so many years of no Seders and few Jewish celebrations, what was I thinking? And with total strangers? I called my dad. "Dad, there was a bunch of leather dykes who came into my club last weekend and invited me to their Seder. What should I do!?" And his response "Of course you have to go! How could you not go? Go already!"

Wavering about my decision until the very last moment, I arrived at D's house feeling nervous and little sorry I had taken his advice. I approached the door and saw the mezuzah, along side the rainbow flags and pink triangle stickers. I walked in and was greeted by the requisite cache of dogs, and then when I looked up I was surrounded by a surreal combination of 40's –something, primarily white, butch-femme couples with a handful of dazzling leather daddy's and Lavender Lesbians thrown in the mix.

I was introduced to everyone and took my seat with the others. We began the evening reading from the hand-made haggadah prepared for the seder, written specifically because so many of these people had been invisibilized, marginalized, traumatized or otherwise neglected by their mainstream Jewish upbringing. As we experienced the meal together, I think I was in shock- it had never occurred to me that Judaism could be contemporary, that my childhood religion and culture could have any relevance in my adult life, or that I could possibly bring my whole self to the table- without having to make excuses or justifications for who I am. It had never occurred to me that being Jewish was a revolutionary spiritual and political path to personal and community liberation.

I cried during the seder itself (you know, those tears that just well up in your eyes and you try to wipe them away before anyone else notices), and then I cried and cried for four days straight. I remember sitting on my bed, talking with my best friend, and not having the words to describe my confusion and grief and anger and desire after that Seder. I was so sad that I had missed out on so much of my Jewish upbringing, resentful that so many Jews are forced to assimilate into a watered down culture, fiercely bitter that so many Jews get pushed out of our own Jewish spaces because of intolerance within "our" community, and mostly just confused about how I was going to integrate this huge experience into my life. I truly felt like I had found my "home" in those short hours at the seder, and after being gone so long I felt scared and lost.

When something so deep happens, there is no going back. That Seder marked my return to Judaism and the beginning of my conscious and proud identity as a Jew. And for that reason, I think about Passover as my own personal Jewish anniversary as well as the time when we sit together with our loved ones and recount the story of liberation- our personal liberation, our people's liberation, ALL people's liberation.

May this haggadah be a reminder to us all that we are beautiful creatures who have a rightful place within our own tradition, and may we bring the radical spirit and vision of this holiday into our daily lives, minute by minute, as we work for love and justice for all people.

Love, Stosh