

Wrestling with Tradition

Contributed by [Haggadot](#)

Source: Love and Justice In Times of War Haggadah

by Mark Silverman

My early years immersed me in a Judaism of male dominance in life and at the seder table, inevitably enticing me to gulp my glasses of real wine as a way of dulling the scene, blurring the edges, until the final songs sent me off to bed in a not unpleasant stupor. Dayenu!

Later, still a child but more aware, I saw the family kowtow to my father, a Yeshiva boy who went secular except for a few occasions each year, such as presiding over a purely Hebrew escape into the pages of his high school Haggadah/yearbook, carefully preserved along with the class photos of boys (only boys) just off the boat.

Still later, a bar mitzvah boy/man, I felt a certain ownership of the brew that for two nights each year brought together a family always on the verge of breaking up, if not for the shepherdess role my mother played for her orphaned brothers and their families.

When I brought home my new mate during the Vietnam era, the seder became a kind of wrestling match, with occasional call-to-order/cut-the-crap wine glass tapping from my still resolute father, as we worked the generational fault line until the last of the desserts were stuffed in.

As a grownup, the seders began with me mimicking my father, lightly but true. Only after a few years did we manage to slowly begin the process of purging the sexism, homophobia, unthinking support of Israel, all the other oppressions and isms, till finally, like athletes at the finish line, the deity reflex itself came into question only to emerge (for now) as a kind of pantheistic, humanistic, ever loving, merging, surging, pulsing, sometimes splurging, boisterous song-filled celebration of springtime and our resolve to buck all odds in Bush's sodden empire to create a world free of war, injustice, inequality, and poverty. And if not, at least a sense of humor about our barely civilized escapades in life.

Perhaps Passover is, when all is said and done, a kind of wine baptism that transcends our modernity and transports us back to a past we must acknowledge in some meaningful way, and forward beyond the present into a better world we must give birth to - even if once again our destiny floats among the bulrushes of the Nile.