

Family Lessons

Contributed by [Haggadot](#)

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by Dan Berger

Though my family would never admit it, one of my first lessons in oppression and resistance came at Seders. Sitting around the table with my grandmother, who survived Auschwitz; my mother, who was raised by two survivors; and my father, who teaches Holocaust studies – Passover had a very political character to it for me. Resistance was portrayed as a natural and necessary outgrowth of brutal oppression. We always talked about the Holocaust and what it meant for us. As I grew up and became aware of white supremacy, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression, I joined the resistance we talked about at Seders. I didn't realize it at the time – and neither did my parents, who opposed my activism – but resistance was and is the perfect way to honor Judaism, or at least the liberatory elements in it. Resistance is what I learned at Seders and what I saw everytime I looked at my grandmother's visible scars of her experience. It's funny that my parents and grandmother were so opposed to my radicalism – they had laid the foundations in me to start to resist. The radical lessons I learned at Seders and Shabbat dinners were threatening to my family, in part because I made connections between Jewish resistance to oppression and the resistance of others. At least implicitly, I challenged them to also Make those connections – and as my politics led to an interest in animal rights, they were upset that my diet ruined time-honored Passover traditions of dipping eggs in saltwater or eating meat at the main meal. They saw my eating habits as a rejection of Judaism and family tradition.

I saw it as a celebration of those traditions.

Seven years after I first became active, I'm still trying to determine fully what it means to be a Jewish radical in today's world. I've been inspired by other examples of Jewish radicalism that I've found – in Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, in the white anti-racist allies of the 1960s and 70s movements, of the courageous people in the International Solidarity Movement. At the same time, my parents have become increasingly conservative, particularly in terms of support for Israel's occupation policies. It doesn't help that my mom is Israeli. Growing up, I learned that Israel was "ours" because of the terrible oppression Jews have faced. Meeting other Jewish radicals against colonization I see that things aren't quite that simple. As I try to navigate the difficult territory we find ourselves in – as Jews, as radicals, as Jewish radicals – I take comfort in remembering what I learned from Passover: people have a right and responsibility to resist and be free.