

The Orange

Contributed by [Rachel Schulties](#)

Source: Susannah Heschel



Six items traditionally adorn the Seder plate. Some have roots in ancient Egypt. Some have roots in the turning of the seasons from later influences in the harvest. Long after Egypt, we lived among the Persians whose New Year falls on the spring equinox. Persians place seven items on a special cloth, including the egg of fertility and greens to celebrate. It is hard to discern which customs we borrowed from our neighbors and which they adapted from us.

The newest symbol on the Seder plate is the Orange. In our own days, the scholar Susannah Heschel instituted this custom as a means of inclusion. Just as the orange has segments and seeds, so do our people.

In the 1980's, Susannah Heschel was invited to lecture at Oberlin College in Ohio. "While on campus, I came across a Haggadah written by students to express feminist concerns. One ritual they devised was placing a crust of bread on the Seder plate as a sign of solidarity with Jewish lesbians. They reasoned: *There is as much room for a lesbian in Judaism as there is for a crust of bread on the Seder plate.* But bread on the Seder plate brings an end to Pesach. It renders everything *chometz*, and suggests that being a lesbian is being transgressive, violating Judaism.

At the next Passover, I placed an orange on our family's Seder plate. I asked everyone to take a segment of the orange, make the blessing over fruit and eat it as a gesture of solidarity with other who are marginalized within the Jewish community. I felt that an orange was suggestive of something else: The fruitfulness for all Jews when each and everyone one of us are contributing and active members of Jewish life. In addition, each orange segment had a few seeds that had to be spit out - a gesture repudiating the exclusion within Judaism."