

But why is there an orange and a tomato on the Seder plate?

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Source: Some parts adapted from Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Pride.com, and Oranges and Olives Haggadah

But why is there an orange and a tomato on the seder plate? This is not traditional for Passover.

Tomato - This tomato brings our attention to the oppression and liberation of farmworkers who harvest fruits and vegetables here in the United States. And it reminds of us of our power to help create justice.

A tomato purchased in the United States between November and May was most likely picked by a worker in Florida. On this night when we remember the Jewish journey from slavery to freedom, we remember numerous cases of modern slavery that have been found in the Florida tomato industry. The tomato on our seder plate might have been picked by someone who has been enslaved. Perhaps this tomato was picked by someone facing other abusive working conditions, such as wage theft, harassment, exposure to dangerous pesticides, or poverty level wages that have not changed for more than 30 years.

But a transformation is underway. Since 1993, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a farmworker organization, has been organizing for justice in the fields. Together with other organizations, they have convinced 11 major corporations, such as McDonald's and Trader Joe's, to join the Fair Food Program, a historic partnership between workers, growers and corporations. We can work to help convince other businesses to join this program. There is link to the Coalition where you can find more information and get involved at the end of the Haggadah.

Orange - The orange on the Seder plate has come to symbolize full inclusion in modern day Judaism for those who were traditionally not seen as full participants or leaders in Jewish life and traditions, especially women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. Initially, and for some still, people see the orange as originating as a response to sexism and exclusion of women. The tale was that a man once said that women don't belong leading aspects of worship in Judaism by saying "A woman on the bimah is like an orange on the Seder plate." (The bimah is a podium where people stand to read from the "Torah", as Jews call the Old Testament of the Bible.) Feminists (people believing in gender equality) responded by celebrating the orange, by placing it in the center the Seder plate showing that since women belonged on the bima, so must an orange on the Seder plate. However, interestingly, the true origin of the orange on the Seder plate is actually different.

The actual story is that in the 1980s, a group of Oberlin College students had composed a new, feminist Haggadah. And in it a story is told in which a woman asks a rabbi, "What room is there for a lesbian in Judaism?" The rabbi responds, "There's as much room for a lesbian in Judaism as there is for a crust of bread on the Seder plate." And thus these students began putting bread on their Seder plate. However, a Jewish feminist scholar, Susannah Heschel, who was visiting the college, was uncomfortable with the idea that a lesbian be equated with bread at Passover, since bread is considered a violation of Passover law and tradition. But she loved the idea of adding to the Seder plate to acknowledge lesbian and gay Jews. So instead, she choose an orange as the symbol to be added to the Seder plate because, she said "because it suggests the fruitfulness for all Jews when lesbians and gay men are contributing and active members of Jewish life." Today, many use the orange to "queer" the Seder and to symbolize the struggle for freedom faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people and solidarity with the LGBTQ community. For those of us who are part of the LGBTQ community here at our Seder, it makes us feel good to be acknowledged and included, especially when we were not during many times of history, and still today in many places.

