

Transcripts of Pride Passover Videos

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ABBY STEIN

I think so much of Pesach and Passover is not just about freedom, but it's also about freedom of coming out, like, coming from a really bad place, whatever that is, enslavement, or what, according to many specifically in Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism, they like to talk about Egypt as being that narrow place, Mitzrayim, which, in Hebrew, could also mean these, like, narrow straits and narrow place. At my own bat mitzvah/coming out celebration naming that I had a few months after I came out, one of the intentions given by one of the Rabbis was ... In every generation we need to see ourselves as though we're coming out of Egypt, and it's not just a metaphorical, "Oh, hypothetically, imagine yourself 3000 years ago. You're building, I don't know, pyramids in Egypt." I think it's a lot more direct, and I will say that for some people they find that sometimes surprising to hear that for me having grown in the Hasidic and Orthodox community, Pesach wasn't so much about, "Oh, 3000 years ago we were enslaved in Egypt and whatever," which, today, I think maybe parts of the story happened, other parts, who knows, but it was always about the message of our own personal exodus, our own personal yetziat mitzrayim.

You can...to me, this is like coming out of the closet, coming out of that narrow place that either society or our families or our communities are putting us in, and Pesach is coming out of the closet, and I need to say for me over the past few years and specifically a few months, I've been very focused on celebration as opposed to tolerance, because a lot of people talk about tolerating and accepting the LGBTQ community, and I use Pesach a lot as an example that the Jewish way is when there's something bad and you get out of that bad place, you don't just tolerate it, you celebrate. Coming out as in the LGBTQ community and beyond. I think the same will go for race liberation. The same goes for people of different economic and socio-economic backgrounds who are working towards liberation. It's not just, "Oh, okay, fine. I'm no longer there." Our reaction is this is amazing and we create a holiday. And I think for Pesach specifically, it's not just one holiday. It's every Shabbat, and every holiday ends up being zekhirat yetziat mitzrayim, remembering that leaving of the narrow place, which is very true for the LGBTQ community because everything we do... People tell me sometimes I should just move on and, like, "Why do you keep talking about it?" And in many ways that's what we were told as Jews. You don't move on from Egypt. You constantly need to remember that narrow place because, both to be grateful, to know what we have overcome, and to make best use of everything we have out of the closet.

So to me that is the overarching message of Pesach. So it's not just what does Pesach have to do with LGBTQ, it's like everything. What is Pesach if not for coming out? If I need to add a fifth question, to me it's very similar to if I need to add a fifth child to the four children of the Haggadah. I would think a lot about the questions that are being shut down, whatever it is, from religious communities, from people who don't like to listen to outsiders, and by outsiders I mean people who are different than them. And once again, to me personally it refers to the LGBTQ, and specifically transgender community, but it goes beyond that. It's the same for everyone who has at any point in their life has been seen as the other. And my question would be why, even on a night where we're told to ask questions, there's still so many questions that some people don't wanna listen to? Why is the fact that even for me I can't go to my parents and start asking them on that night why can't I be part of your community, part of your family? Why is it that there's still so many people who don't have a Seder to be at simply because of the gender and sexual identity? To me that is the fifth child, not the smart child, not the wicked one, not the simple one, not the one

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who doesn't know how to ask questions, but the one who is not even invited, the one who is told, "Don't show your face. We don't wanna see you. We don't wanna have you."

So I would add stuff to both the Seder and the Seder plate. Let's start with the Seder plate. So some of the things that already have been added and that I already add, there's the orange, which is a very popular one, and it's supposed to include everyone. I would say specifically adding something that represents the LGBTQ community, and people could get creative with that. I think the Seder already has enough rigid set-in-stone customs. How about this is a time to be more open? Which, by that alone, represents the LGBTQ community. But whatever it is, a certain fruit, something that is cooked or baked, something that obviously makes sense. Like, I feel like adding the rainbow flag might be a good decoration, but it's not a Seder plate thing, but adding something specifically. I know I have in the past added different colored vegetables. I have add like...I got the idea from Easter, dare I say, but I added...you know, a lot of people do an egg. Like, that's the beitzah, the egg on the Seder plate. I added an egg that has been dyed, you know, in a different color. We can play around with that, but I think it should be something that is intentional, something that you and the people who are there know that this is intentionally adding to welcome the LGBTQ community. I think just like we need to add for other Jewish communities and people and families that have for far too long been left out from the default.

Now with the Seder alone, one of the first things I added to the Seder unrelated to LGBTQ originally when I started hosting my own Seders. So after I left, I left my family in 2012, and then for a while I didn't have much to do with anything. I was very angry on everything Jewish, and even after I knew that most Jews are not ultra-orthodox I was still...it took me a while to get over that part, but once I did and I started doing my own Seders, one of the first things I added was an appetizer before we started anything, because in my experience most people, you know... I know with my family, the Haggadah alone before the meal takes, like, two or three hours. But even without it, even someone who just very briefly goes to Haggadah, they will take like an hour and a half, two hours before the meal, so I add it. Usually it will be, like, some form of, like, latkes or mashed potato latkes, and then, like, I've been making matzo meal pancakes, just, like, to have something to start off with.

And now when I'm thinking of that in the context of the LGBTQ community, it makes me think of a lot of LGBTQ people who are struggling also with food, food security, with access to a safe place, a safe haven, and so on. So, so much of adding something to the Seder, and in this case...and in this case, before Kadeish, we add...I don't know how to call it in Hebrew, to add a sixteenth ... to the Haggadah, but it would be to start off with food because we need to keep in mind that people could show up to our Seders who haven't had access to food for a while. Food security is not just a matter of economic justice or economic freedom or eradicating poverty. Obviously it's where the intersectionality comes in and the fact that LGBTQ people, specifically trans people and trans women of color, tend to struggle more with food security than a lot of other people. So adding this acknowledgement that we know that some people are coming to the Seder, to this massive meal, to this big...let's call it a party, who are really hungry, not because they are waiting for the Seder or for kiddush because they don't have access to food. So to me adding that original, that initial,

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"Let's start with eating something," is a way of both remembering and also the symbolic thing of we need to think more of people who do not have safe access and secure access to food.

I would split this up in two. I would say there is a childhood memory and there is a more contemporary modern memory. The childhood one of Pesach to me has always been the four questions, and what I mean by that is not the actual questions, but a lot of families have the custom that only the youngest child or just one child asks their questions. And in my family everyone asked the questions. So for example at my father's Seder, we'll be all of us, boys and girls, which is very uncommon for girls specifically to take an official role. Everyone asks their questions individually. So usually the older ones only say in Hebrew and the younger ones do Hebrew and Yiddish, and the very young one sometimes they only do something in Yiddish, but even more so when it always...like, it stood out to me was at my grandfather's Seder. So my grandfather who is a Hasidic Rabbi, he does the Seder in his synagogue with many...a lot of people, and it's that one time when... The women still sit separately, usually on a separate table but in the same room, and the women...everyone would stand up.

Like, my aunt who is 50 years old and my cousin who is 10 years old, boys, girls, everyone stands up and asks the questions individually, and it takes sometimes time, so as a young child sometimes it would get a bit annoying when, like, it takes half an hour for everyone to ask the questions, but now when I look back at it and I think it does. It's maybe now directly LGBTQ-related, but specifically for me I identified as a woman since I remembered myself since I was really young and that was, like, that one thing a year that in such a gender-segregated community where I grew up in, there was some form of equality. It went according to age, so it didn't, like, start with the boys and then to the girls, which is very common in the Hasidic community. It started when, like, in my grandfather's home, the oldest child is a girl. My aunt, she would start and then go down to all the kids. It felt this...I wouldn't call it feminist necessarily, but it was this one time not just during the Seder, but it was this one time of the year where I felt there's some kind of equality. I could stand up and do something, and yes, I was sitting in the man section because that's what I was told but I didn't have to feel like, "Oh, maybe I shouldn't do that. It doesn't belong to me." So that is definitely one of my favorite, I would say, childhood and growing up memories of the Seder.

Some of the more modern ones and specifically up to COVID was I always threw big Seders. At the peak I once cooked and hosted a Seder from A through Z, meaning I made all the food. I do five course Seder meals plus the appetizers, and at the peak I have 30 people and we have people of literally every background. I'm talking people of every Jewish background, people of so many non-Jewish backgrounds that we invited into our home and I really enjoy it personally, both the cooking, and, like, I always post pictures on Instagram and on social media, but also the bringing people together. And I remember the last time two years ago, 2019, which was the last time I did a big one before the apocalypse hit, so to speak, I had a few of my friends who also grew up Orthodox and Hasidic and have left the community, but then one of my best friends who grew up in the Mormon community and was excommunicated and she was sitting at the table and other friend of mine who was a student at a Yale Divinity School, and, like, so on. So we have people of all different backgrounds and it was so interesting. Like, he was sitting and comparing different

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customs and different traditions. Like, a Seder is like a sit-down meal where there's so many interesting customs, and specifically my friend who grew up Mormon and then us, kind of like my friends who grew up Hasidic and I, we kept comparing who is more cult-like and we got the conclusion that both of our communities are very culty. But it was just...it was a really sweet and amazing opportunity, and I'm looking forward hopefully next year. Already last year in 2020 we all said, "You know, next year in person," in person and it doesn't look like it's gonna happen this year, but hopefully next year and I can again go back and have people ... as the Seder goes, before the Ma Nishtanah everyone wants, and to really have that, like, multicultural experience that makes the Seder so beautiful.

I would say ultimately the most important message when I think about the LGBTQ and the Seder LGBTQ and Pesach is to be intentional. So much of the Seder, of Pesach can be triggering to people who grew up in religious communities, either because there's a lot of restrictions, there's a lot of... For example, I know... Me personally, I've been sober for six years, so alcoholism and, like, addiction can be a hard thing specifically on Pesach, but the LGBTQ community, so many people that I know who grew up in religious communities of LGBTQ have all these very negative memories of the Seder because in many ways it's a Jewish equivalent of, like, Thanksgiving when always, "Oh, I had this creepy uncle who made some homophobic comments. I had this person make a transphobic comment." For many Jews that's the Seder, and for many LGBTQ Jews, there's too many negative memories, whatever it is. The grandmother asking when they're gonna get married to a boy, to a girl, expecting a certain rigid lifestyle or whatever. So sitting on the table and listening to traditional and modern ideas that are literally erasing at best and often openly discriminatory against who we are. So I think it's very important for us to always and specifically at the Seder, on a holiday like Pesach, to be intentional because ultimately Pesach could be all about LGBTQ acceptance and celebration, but for too many people it hasn't been, so just being intentional of that, realizing people have had struggles with that, some people are still struggling with that, and how we create our holiday, our Yom Tov tables, our Seder tables, to make sure that it really is inclusive for everyone.

ADAM ELI

My name is Adam Eli. I'm a community organizer and writer based in New York City. Well, I always say that Passover is my second favorite holiday because my first favorite holiday is New York City Pride. And the reason I love Passover so much is because I think that it really highlights the similarities that Jewish people and queer people have. We're both groups that are traditionally marginalized, we're both groups that have survived against all odds. And we're both groups that love to sing and celebrate powerful women.

And so, when it comes...Passover, to me embodies everything that I love about the intersection of being queer and Jewish, because I believe that ultimately, Passover is a call to action. Holocaust survivor and my role model, Elie Wiesel, said, "I love Passover, because for me, it is a cry against indifference, a cry for compassion." And I absolutely love that.

One of the many things that I love about Judaism and queerness is that it is constantly changing and constantly evolving. Passover is not just a ritual that celebrates the past, it is also a promise for the future, and how we can reimagine ourselves as Jews and as queer people. So, the question that I would have us ask is, how can we be more actively inclusive, and fully embracing of Jews of color, black Jews, queer Jews, and especially trans Jews? And I believe that as a queer person, it's my obligation to show up for all marginalized people. And I believe that as a Jewish person, it's my obligation to show for all marginalized people and I can't think of a better time to remember that during Passover.

Something that I would add to the Pesach Seder to make it feel more queer-inclusive, is I would add a section or maybe a step that is a direct call to action. Meaning throughout the Passover Seder we're talking about, and thinking about, you know, the trials and tribulations of the Jewish people went through, and that comes up, at least in my Seder, not just when we left Egypt, but also antisemitism and the Holocaust, and Jews in the Soviet Union...behind the Iron Curtain, etc. And there's still so much persecution today, racism, transphobia, xenophobia, queerphobia, etc. And so, I would love to see a space that has a direct call to action. Meaning this year, what are you going to do to make the world a better, more loving place that's in line with the ideals that we're talking about here tonight at the Passover Seder?

Well, I can't think of anything off the top of my head, and that I think that's something that I'd really like to, you know, think about and meditate on because symbolism is important, especially in Passover. But something that I can say is that at my family Seder, we decorate the entire table with frogs, you know, to represent the second plague and the tackier the frog, the better so people know whenever they come to our house, especially for Passover to bring a frog. And so, when you walk into the dining room, the entire room is like, filled with hideous, loud, tacky green frogs. And I think it's very...I don't know if it's queer, but it's definitely camp.

I have two very distinct favorite Seder memories. The first one is the first time that I ever co-led a Seder with my father because I love Passover. It's my favorite holiday, second favorite holiday. And I remember so vividly being able to sit with my father at the front of the head of the table and lead it with him. That was one. But then another one, I think it was in 2017. I did a Seder in the city, at this huge, huge, huge Art Gallery, the Jeffrey George gallery in Soho. And I co-led it

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with one of my dear, dear friends and Jewish artists, Chloe Wise, and there was a huge, huge Keith Haring painting that was hanging over the Seder table. And I won't get into specifics, but the painting was very, very queer, and a little bit explicit.

And we just did all, like, the coolest stuff. We had a montage of the Rugrats Passover episode, splice playing on the walls. We had a klezmer band that came for moggy. We had people, you know, like, acting out the different parts. And it was just this, like, totally incredible experience. And I was, you know, 25 or 26 and I led like a 50-person Seder. And it was just so cool.

Something else that I think that is really important that I believe all of the time but it's specifically relevant on Passover is that being Jewish means that you are part of something greater than yourself. And being queer means that you are a part of being something greater than yourself. And being both of those means you're really a part of something greater than yourself. And that means that you are never alone. As a Jew and as a queer person, you have a deep, deep, rich history of resilience, love, beauty and creativity to be proud of. And I think that's worth celebrating all day, every day of the year, but especially during the Passover Seder.

And if you're at a Passover Seder, where queerness isn't as openly referenced, you can think that as long as there's been Jewish history, as long as there's been any type of history, there has certainly, certainly been queer history.

AIDEN LEVY

Hi, I'm Aiden Levy. I'm 17. And I'm from Pelham. I always, each year with my family, I go to my cousin's house, just in Westchester as well. And it's always, you know, a couple of weeks before I always dread it thinking that, oh, I'm gonna see people that I haven't seen forever, it's gonna be all these drab conversations, cousins that are my age or older that sometimes I always think is, you know, awkward to be around or awkward to hold a lot of conversations because I don't see them regularly. But usually what happens every single year, even though I keep dreading it is that once I'm there, and we get going, it's...because I don't really see a lot of my extended family a lot, that it's always such a nice experience to be with my cousins, with a lot of people that they're so charismatic and bring so much energy and have so much passion for the holidays and everything that...and especially for Passover because that's the one holiday really that we all actually try to get together the...most importantly for that one.

So, it is, like, a full, like, two tables where we have several cousins, you know, that are a couple of years older than me, just like my siblings that are a little bit older than me, then there's my younger brother, who's the youngest. I mean...and we have two younger ones that we started this tradition of meeting up before even one of them was born. And now that...her name is Sophie, and now she's starting to come and everything so it's, like, kind of crazy to think that when we started the tradition of meeting up, someone who's now a part of our family is not even...I mean, what, didn't even exist at that point. And now they're, you know, walking, talking, and even sometimes participating in all this fun singing and everything. So, I think it's just...I mean, being with family, I think is really important for me, but also not something that I do a lot of. So, I always dread in terms of, like, I always think that sometimes I'm a little bit awkward in social interactions or anything so even with, sometimes, my family.

So, I always think that it's not always the easiest to get together with, you know, 30, 40 plus people, of which I don't really speak to that often or live, you know, in North Carolina or anything, and we all try to get together in one place. But it really becomes a different experience where it's, like, we're there for five, six hours, really. And it's all just about catching up with one another, and talking about things. And it's almost like a seamless transition where even if we haven't seen each other for an entire year, there's not really a period of an awkward, "Oh, how are you? How are you doing?" You know, the weird formalities. It's straight into, you know, "I saw that you posted this on Instagram," or if it's a sports-related thing, or if it's something about what happened at one of our families, or anything like that, it's really...it's a seamless transition and I really do appreciate that.

And, you know, being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I think that it's really important. Having a stable family system, and I know that a lot of people, especially if they're in the LGBTQ+ community, don't really have a stable family system that they can rely upon, and so that's...I guess, has been one thing that I've been pretty lucky about that I don't really actually have to worry is the actual, like, you know, how my family would perceive me in terms of just being who I am and, you know, being at Passover. And it's more of, you know, they sometimes, you know, pester me to talk more during Passover, or they want me to get a little bit more involved, not just on Passover and stuff like that. It's not really, oh, we don't want you here anymore. Or something like I know that a lot of people experience, you know, worldwide. So, definitely,

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Passover is really important to me, and especially, you know, it's a slightly different perspective being from the LGBTQ+ community. But for my family, it's like, it's not even a...it's not even something that I would think of consciously while I'm there with everyone because it's just such a strong support system.

Yeah, there's...there's one, I'm not gonna directly quote it because I'm probably gonna misquote it, but there's one thing in Exodus that I remember...I've always remembered. It's something along the lines of, you will not judge and you will always support and love your stranger or a stranger in general. And I think that I've always read it or, you know, it's been read in general, and that part has always really stuck with me in terms of the importance that who you are, even if it's a complete stranger, or if it's just a family member, whatever, the first thing you do as a person, as, you know, as a Jew, is to love them and to support them and not to judge them harshly or judge them at all, rather than...sometimes the misconceptions in, I guess, American society overall, that the first thing you do when you look at someone is judge them, you know, you judge a book by its cover. And I think that that passage has always, even before I even, I guess, consciously was thinking about it in that way, it has always been important to me that I think that the Jewish traditions and specifically, you know, for my family, especially when we're talking about different passages and everything, is the focus on the stranger being loved and being...not judged and being always part of the community, always part of Jewish tradition, whether it's in a synagogue, or it's your family, or if it's your children or anything, always being one with them and not perceiving them in a different light or anything just because of something that is outside of their control.

If I had to add a question, I would probably ask something along the lines of, how can I personally and consciously be a better ally and a better person in both my school and with my friends or in my family? And the reason why I would ask a question like that is the...more emphasis, I guess, on the conscious part of it, because there are a lot of things, or if you call them microaggressions, or little things that a lot of people don't really think a lot of, or you don't even realize it's happening in front of you, or that you personally did, that sometimes it's just a little, like, a light bulb that goes off and someone, like in my head, where I know that there's no intention, there's no connotative meaning to it, or there's no intent or anything along those lines, but there are some little things that if you're consciously aware that it makes people uncomfortable, or that they're...they don't actually enjoy hearing, or things, whether it's, like, common phrases that Americans like to say, or if it's writings, or if it's certain words, or certain stereotypes or tropes or whatnot, if you consciously think about those things, I think, before you would say them, and whether...it's not just to someone, like, in the community, it could be just anyone at all times in that, like, you know, in itself, it will defeat the even turn of phrase of saying that because over time, when it's not said as much anymore, it'll slowly fade away. And the new norm will be to not have said that in the beginning, which is I guess the point of having everyone more aware.

Well, my family has actually talked about this a little bit, and I've actually done my own readings and research or forum pages where people, like, discuss things like that. And I've read and I've talked with my parents about something, not necessarily a specific item, but more of a specific color, I think. I've read and I've, you know, talked about specifically orange being added to the actual Seder plate for it to be symbolically representative of...kind of, like, it's such like a bright

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color, and it's so...I guess it would stand out more on the plate and it's more so to be inclusive in terms of not just the LGBTQ+ society, but for all those that are also not necessarily directly represented by what has been historically, you know, a Passover tradition in a dinner.

So, I think something...I mean, whether it's, I guess, a piece of orange, or even something simpler that's not edible, like, you know, an orange, like, handkerchief or something like that, but that's included on the plate more for the symbolic purpose of having it be there for inclusivity purposes, rather than actually incorporating it into the actual, you know, eating of it or using it for some sort of specific purpose, I guess. My favorite Seder memory probably would be last year, I mean, the last time we did it, I think specifically because more of the family was there than usual because we had people that came from North Carolina, or people that came from different parts of New York, that we all managed to be there all at once. And it was a harder time because one of my cousins had gone through serious treatment for cancer, and was feeling, you know, not well at all and had adverse side effects and really affected their family, and they still made the trip all the way up to New York. And we were able to see him virtually. We were able to get him, like, on a...I'm not sure if it was on a Zoom, which is now, you know, common, but I'm not sure how we did it virtually, but we were able to see him virtually, which was really important for us.

And there was, right after we left the table and we were busy, you know, looking for desserts or whatnot, some of my cousins, the ones that are specifically in around my age, so whether they are at my age or up until like their early 20s, so that's about 6 or 7 of us, we were sitting on the sofa and we were just kind of sitting in silence for a moment just thinking about, you know, that at this time, the year prior, that we were all in a much more, I guess, lighter and more positive mood in terms of this, like, the standing of the family in terms of everyone's health or mentally or whatnot. And so, I think that we kind of, like, had to take a moment and just kind of everything, let it sink in. I mean at this time it was before COVID or anything so we didn't even know what we were gonna get by next year, but we had to take a moment and just let, I guess our insecurities and our vulnerabilities kind of seep in. And of that, I mean, not publicly at the time, but of that, when I was taking that moment of silence, or just taking that minute, or whatever it was, I was also thinking about me being part of the LGBTQ+ community and how such...I guess in my, I mean, in my brain at that point, such drastic ideals and values were, I was not sure how they would be interpreted. And on the opposite side, in terms of someone's health, or someone who I don't really see that much, but I could see and hear stories about them in such pain, in such agony, and that they have to go through all these procedures, and it's kind of tearing their family part, and yet the majority of them were still not willing but they were very...they were excited to come for the Passover Seder, which in my mind, I always...I initially thought when my dad told me that they were still coming, I thought that it was ridiculous. I thought, oh, they have to be with their family. They have to support each other. They shouldn't...you know, if there's any good excuse to skip something, you know, this would be the time to just say that you can't go. And my dad was explaining to me, and it didn't really make sense, but I guess in that moment of silence, it kind of made a little bit more sense that they're not going to escape their problems, they are going to kind of confide in their larger family.

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And even though I don't see them that often, we are still all connected not just by blood or of course by marriage or anything, but kind of our Jewish tradition, and especially Passover, being with one another, and being together and being connected, and letting our problems, or not necessary problems, but our challenges in life and our...things that we're scared of, or whatever it was, laid all out on the table, I mean, literally and figuratively on the Passover table.

And, you know, we would have...at one point, when we were on the couch, we had a discussion about just overall, I guess, mortality and health. And then it kind of transitioned even, I'm not sure how, but it kind of transitioned into future life for each of us. At that point, you know, I was still a junior. So, we were talking about future, you know, me becoming a senior. And for my sister who's in her freshman year of college, she was talking about how, you know, she's going to, how she was, I mean, going to experience, you know, her college in terms of, like, its full effect halfway through her freshman year.

And for some other of my cousins, they were in junior year of college, or they were in graduate school, or they had a separate job outside of school, and it was kind of thinking about that, there's gonna be probably less time for us to be with each other, you know, every single year, multiple times a year, but the ones that we are together, we all have to make the effort just like it happened that year, to be with one another, and not just for the sake of going through the motions and just, you know, check off a box that we were here during such an important holiday, but more that we're there and we're there for a purpose, for not just being there for each other in terms of having a conversation or having a shoulder to cry on, but more of the figurative presence of having family that you might not necessarily, you know, talk to every single day, but you know on a more secondary, you know, religious, moral, and blood or marriage level, that they will always be there for you.

And it's more than just a simple, you know, text that anyone can send you of, "I'm here whenever you wanna talk," I feel like it's different actually being there at the table during Passover, and reading everything and, you know, discussing everything and, you know, allowing, you know, at least in my family, allowing kids as young as like two or three participate, to as old as my aunt who is, like, I don't actually don't know how old she is, but I know that she's very, very old. And so, it's kind of like, there's the entire spectrum I guess of life there in front of you. And the more you think about it, the more you realize that it's more of, like, the...I guess the Passover Seder is more, like, in total, like an onion. There's more layers beneath everything. And that the more that you allow yourself to be immersed in it, the more that you will actually get out of it.

I guess just adding on to what I was saying earlier, I think that being at Passover and having everyone that you might not necessarily talk to every single day, but having people that are toddlers all the way up to, you know, they've been alive, and they've been part of the family since way before I was born.

I think it's important in terms of knowing that once you do finally come out, it's more than just I guess an Instagram post or a Facebook forward or whatever it is. It's having the, I guess, the security that you are part of the family. And really, or at least it should be, nothing that you...like,

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nothing that is part of should also, the fact that you are part of the family. So, even though I haven't had a Seder yet where I've been actually publicly out to my family, during a Passover Seder since right now, you know, it's, everything with COVID, it's a bit harder to get together. We had a virtual one, but it was very back and forth. It wasn't really...it was kind of cutting out and not many people attended. And it was more of, I guess, in that sense, it was more of a check the box type of thing, which was kind of disappointing. But even though I've been, I've always...in my mind, I've been dreading thinking that, oh, the next big family function that's gonna be able to be attended, it's gonna be a bit more awkward.

But the more that I thought about it, especially, you know, during a holiday, like Passover, the more I thought about it, the more I'm looking forward to it, in a sense, where there's not gonna be a part of me that's always hiding, or a part of me that's always second-guessing myself even though I know I shouldn't have. But this...it's gonna be more of once I'm there and once I'm with everyone, I can truly be there with everyone. Not just you know, eating with them, singing with them, talking with them, but more of, on a mental level and on a, like, an emotional level, be able to, just as much as they give me, me giving back to them. And I think that's important because even though I guess in my mind, I've always thought that I'm doing the most that I can at the time, and same thing for everyone else back to me and the family, not that it's due or anything, but I think that it's important for me to share all of myself to people that I consider not just family but, you know, the first people I would call in situations. I think that it's kind of due that as much as they're giving me, that I have to give back to them, and not have, I mean, once I was comfortable with everything, but now that I'm way past that point, definitely I'm gonna, you know, be able to be there with everyone. And if they have any questions, if they have any...they wanna talk about things, I'm now not gonna have that hesitancy or, you know, try to change the subject quickly or walk away. It's now gonna be more of a...not only a, oh, I should do it, but I want to do it, I want to be involved, I want to talk to everyone about who I am, how it affects them, how they see it in their life. And I think that's something that I had not really previously considered when I was, I guess, debating myself in terms that I wasn't really sure how I would be able to communicate with family. And not just my immediate family but the bigger family that I see specifically in Passover, because there's just so many of them, and a lot of them I only see once or twice a year at most. And it's such an intimate holiday, I just assumed that it would be, you know, it would be unimaginable, it would be agony, it would be nothing I would wanna ever be with.

But now I kind of can't wait until I'm, like, around the table, we're talking. And even if, you know, some of my cousins or some of my aunts and uncles, whatever, are slightly, you know, annoying with the normal things that they do, just like, you know, the normal things that family likes to pick on other family members of doing, the act of being there so completely and I guess being so completely vulnerable but in, like, the positive ways are something that I am really excited for, for the next Passover that I'm able to attend, like, actually.

ARI FERNANDEZ

I live in Stamford, Connecticut, and I work for Hillels of Westchester as their Jewish Life coordinator. So what resonates for me for Passover, as a member of the queer community, is that you can add whatever you want to the holiday. I think sometimes when we think about holidays, like Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, it's scripted, right? So you go to synagogue, you sit down, they tell you what to do. You sit, you stand, you eat some challah, apples, honey, you know.

So Passover is really cool because it's all at home, so you can do whatever you'd like. If you have a restless baby at the table, maybe you're gonna cut things from the table. And so for me, as a member of the queer community, I love that you can add things that are representative of yourself and of your family and your community and whoever's at the table with you, or maybe whoever is at the virtual table with you, too.

And I love that we are commanded to open the door as wide as possible and yell and for everyone to come to the table and partake in the meal, and I think that's something that we could learn a lot from in society as a whole.

If I were to add something to the four questions, a fifth question, as a queer person, I would add, "What can we take from this night and add to all other nights to create a more expansive table?" because, like I said, there's this aspect of Passover where you open your doors and welcome in the stranger. And I think if we welcomed more in society, maybe things that we might not understand...

I hear from a lot of people that they don't necessarily understand trans identity or what being gay is like, and they don't understand. They think it's a choice or something, but maybe if we were to have a more expansive table for the stranger or for something that we perceive as strange, and we only perceive it as strange because we don't understand, by inviting others to the table, we might gain a better understanding of one another.

I think including the orange, as Susanna Heschel has recommended, is a very popular thing among feminist and queer circles to represent that anyone can belong at the Seder table and anyone belongs at Passover. But I personally, I think that the idea of creating your own Haggadah is really exciting. I like that there's the opportunity if you wanted to add poetry or arts or whatever you would like to make it a more inclusive service. Well, not service, but Seder. So I love a Haggadah that features various writers besides, like, that sometimes impersonal third-person narration that many Haggadah feature. And I would love to see more queer voices featured, like from Abby Stein or Rabbi Sandra Lawson or Adam Eli or Chella Man. I would love to see more inclusion of various voices, not just the simple retelling of, "This is how we left Egypt, and we were all slaves in Egypt," and all of these sorts of things.

I would say I have, like, a general ask of the Jewish community that I want people to be more open to the concept of simply adding things to the Seder or the Seder plate because I feel like every year that whenever I share a table with my mom, we always have this argument of, like, "Oh, like, you're really gonna add an orange to the plate. Like, that's not traditional. Like, let's keep it traditional."

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I know, like, one year I said, "I want to add an olive because I wish for peace between Israelis and Palestinians." And she's like, "No, like that's too, like, froufrou." I think if we were to see Passover as this practice for pursuit of a more radically inclusive community, I think that we would have a more exciting Passover. And it's something that could add to our lives year-round if we see it as more of, like, a practice for the rest of the year of inclusion, inclusion of the stranger or the subject that you might not understand or be wary of.

My favorite Passover memory was when I was an undergrad at Appalachian State University in North Carolina and I was president of Hillel there. So every year, we would throw the Mountaineer Seder, which would be like in the intermediate days of Pesach, and everyone was invited to come. We didn't charge anyone to come. Anyone was welcome to come and grab a plate of food, participate in a short Seder.

It was very informational, so there's a small synagogue at the Temple of the High Country that holds a very near and dear place in my heart, and community members from the synagogue were at our Mountaineer Passover one year, and we were playing just, like, Jewish songs. I think it was, like, during dinner or at the end of the Seder. And we had, like, a soundtrack that one of the board members had created and "Hava Nagila" came on. And one of the community members stood up and started dancing. She was, like, a really great dancer and, like, was trained in Israeli dance. And we formed this, like, really, like, long line, and we were just, like, twisting around the tables and dancing and celebrating. And it was such, like, I feel like, a left turn from, you know, when we'd been sitting down for a service and, like, eating our food and things like that, that it was just, like, such a great break. I remember it, like, very fondly.

Just that I think every Jewish holiday has the opportunity to be queer if we only open our hearts to it. Yeah. That's all, though.

DANIEL GOLDBERG

Hi, my name is Daniel Goldberg. I use he, him pronouns. I'm from Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, and I study at Wesleyan University.

For me, the Passover holiday resonates to me as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, because it represents a shift from oppression into pride. So the Pharaoh was obviously an oppressive force. And I think as members of the LGBTQ+ community, we all have pharaohs in our lives and symbolically. And my favorite part is Miriam and her optimism throughout that we should have timbrels with us and not let go of them, and keep them for a moment that we can celebrate. And I think, there's a lot of dark times as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, that we should always remember to keep our timbrels because at some point, there will be a time that we can dance, that we can celebrate, and have pride.

Personally, I think as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, if I could add a question to the four questions, it would be, what can we do for the groups that are being persecuted right now? And what are the groups that are being persecuted right now? I think it's really easy to look back and say, "Wow, I would have done something different if I was in that situation." But to actually actively think now about what we can do to prevent a situation that happened, like the Israelites, like is happening right now all across the world to different groups of people would be good to think about.

If I could add anything to the Seder plate, it would be, well, something that I've actually seen already, which is an orange. And what people say, at least what I've read about it is that oranges are sweet, yet you have to spit out the seeds in order to eat them. And in order to spit out those seeds, we can think of that in terms of homophobia, and how sometimes in order to get to something sweet, you need to, like, repudiate a little bit of what comes with it. And so there will always be homophobia. And just like, you know, dipping the parsley into salty water, like, it's got a symbolic meaning, the orange. And if we think about those seeds, when we're spitting them out actively and talk about it, it can be a nice educational moment for everybody.

My favorite Seder memory would probably have to be every year I go to a family friend's house, and it's a big group, obviously pre-COVID. And I love that community aspect. And we go around the table, and it was their family tradition first and we kind of picked it up to sing or speak Haggadah as fast as possible. And it's in English and we're just going as fast as we can. Everybody's laughing and our faces are turning purple because we're going so fast. And it's really funny just to watch the adults, the kids, everybody in the room kind of almost rapping Haggadah as fast as they possibly can. I'll always remember people just losing their consciousness a little bit doing so.

I think I don't have anything specific to add, just that the more that we think of religion in the context of the queer experience, the better that...or the more that we can help people who feel stuck within religion. I think a lot of the time, religion seems to be the antithesis of the queer experience. And it's good to bring that into our Seders and into more than just the Seder, just so that people feel that they can be accepted in any community, religious or not, that they feel they can find somewhere where they're not persecuted and they can be themselves.

FAWN MENDEL

I live in Edgemont, which is in Westchester County in New York. And I am actually a director at a synagogue called Scarsdale Synagogue. And as the director, I am kind of the nucleus of the operations. In order for everything to happen, it kind of has to come through me. So, that's what I do for a career now. And I love it, it's really been a wonderful experience, reconnecting with Judaism because as a child, I certainly grew up Jewish. And I think more in my 20s you sort of veer away from it a little bit. But this has really brought me back and my children and my whole family, we're all members at the synagogue, which is lovely. It's a warm and very welcoming synagogue.

The Seder plate, to me, is a little bit traditional, especially the one, you know, the ones that I've had at my family Seders growing up. My parents weren't raised, you know, super religious or anything but they are certainly, you know, a little stuck on the tradition. They have the old, you know, Maxwell House Haggadah. So, there wasn't a lot of difference when it came to what the Seder plate looked like in my home. But I have noticed that, as of lately, the Seder plate has been looking a little bit different and I love that. I love the addition of the orange, which I know represents LGBTQ, but I also know it represents minorities and women. And all of that is really important to me, as a woman and as a member of the LGBT community, I feel like it's important to, you know, address the elephant in the room, that we're not traditional anymore. Life is different now and back in the day, there were certain ways to celebrate. And I think it's really important that we do change, you know, with the changing world, it doesn't have to always be exactly as the Maxwell House Haggadah had it written. So, I do love the addition of the orange on the Seder plate. I think it would be great to make something even more LGBTQ in the sense of the rainbow. So, in my mind, I would love to see a kosher for Passover rainbow cookie, something that can bring in all the traditions.

The four questions to me seem very much about why is this night different from all other nights? I mean, that's the main idea of the four questions. And to me, being part of the LGBT community, it's really hard to think that, like, we shouldn't be celebrating differences all year round. So, my question, if I were to add a question to the four questions would be, why is this night the only night that we celebrate differences when we really should be celebrating differences all year round? And that, to me, is very much something I would love to teach my children. Because really the point of the holiday, why do we eat matzah? Why do we, you know, recline? These are the traditional questions. But I think it's okay to be different all year round. You know, you wanna eat matzah all year round then eat matzah all year round. And, you know, you wanna not necessarily always have to fit in the norm. And that's something I'm trying to instill in my children. So, I would love to have the idea that it's okay to be different all the time.

Yeah. I think that changing is a very important thing. And I'm actually a director at Scarsdale Synagogue, and it's a Reform synagogue, and one of the most telling things that happened to me during my interview process, and actually it happened after my interview process. So, I had interviewed, I had gotten the job. And I certainly am not your stereotypical executive director at a synagogue, I have no experience in this field at all until now. I was a television producer for part of my life and a property manager for part of my life and a mom. And those are, I would say, you

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know, where my expertise was. However, I think the temple was looking for something a little bit different, a little bit out of the norm. And when I got the job, and I accepted it, I had a couple of conversations with the rabbi. And I remember him asking me for a bio that I could send that he would be able to send out to the congregation to tell them about myself. And when I wrote back to him, I said to him, I just, you know, I included that I live in Edgemont with my wife and my two children. And I said, "If you feel that the synagogue isn't ready for this information, feel free to say I live in Edgemont with my family." And I think it was the fastest he got back to me and all of our conversations. And his answer was, if this congregation isn't ready for that information, then they don't belong in this congregation. I felt like such a warm feeling. You know, from the minute that he said that, that my family which doesn't look like everybody else's family would be welcomed with open arms in this community. And we certainly are in a part of New York where people are liberal, but there's not a ton of LGBTQ families. There are some, it's a smaller number than I think you might find in Brooklyn or something, you know, a little bit more where younger people are. But this made me feel very welcome and it made me feel that Judaism is changing. It's not exactly the way it always was. And it's okay, you know, to be different, like I said, which is sort of part of this whole holiday, that it's a different night. And, you know, maybe it should be different all year round.

If I had something that I could add to the Seder plate to make it feel more inclusive, I would add a kosher for Passover rainbow cookie. I feel it is the perfect representation, it's delicious, it's sweet, it's got all the different colors, and it represents obviously LGBTQ with the rainbow. I just think it would be the perfect addition. It's not subtle. It's a rainbow. Here we are, everybody knows what the rainbow stands for. And I would love to see it on a Seder plate. And thinking of it, maybe I should put it on my Seder plate in Passover 2021. We could all use a rainbow in 2021.

That's a good question. What is my best memory of Passover of a Seder? You know, it's hard to say. I would have to think back to all the different Seders, but I think in the last few years I've had a warm feeling and that's more because it took a little time for my parents to be accepting of my partner. And, you know, when I was 16 years old, I had a conversation with my mother, which was a little bit, like, insinuating that maybe there's something different about me when it came to my future partner who I would choose and it was really swept under the rug. And so flashforward, you know, I tried to live a very normal life and when that didn't exactly work out for me, you know, I was a late person to decide that I was gonna be part of the LGBT community. It wasn't really a decision, it was just more, like, the right time, and that I didn't wanna spend any more time thinking about what people would think about me. And so, in the last few years, my Seders have been celebrated with my parents and my wife and my kids. It feels very special to me that my parents have finally come around and been accepting of my lifestyle. Because it didn't start that way. It was a little bit of a bumpy road. And again, it didn't start for me when I was a teenager. So, they have only had, you know, a few years to get used to it. But so for me, the last few years have been the most important and the most touching.

I guess the thing about Passover to me that is important is that it's one of these holidays where even back when I was in college, I remember my parents would say to me, "Do you have any friends that wanna come home with you for Passover?" It's really one of these holidays that's

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warm and welcoming and inclusive, like, if you don't have anywhere to go to celebrate Passover, come and celebrate it with us. And, you know, we opened the door to Elijah and, you know, it's the message of Passover of being open and inclusive is really evident. I guess it all sort of depends on how you interpret it but in my interpretation, it feels like we're opening our arms to everybody. And I brought friends home that were Jewish and I brought friends home that were not Jewish and it didn't really matter because everyone was interested. You know, I remember I had a friend in college who was from Jordan, and she came home with me because it was too far to travel home and we had a school break. And she was fascinated by the Passover Seder. So, I think Passover is really one of these holidays where, you know, maybe kids don't love it because they can't eat chocolate chip cookies, but they can welcome...you know, be welcoming, open the door to their friends, open their door to anyone who wants to learn about Passover. And I was really touched that this holiday is about that. You know, it's not like a closed-door holiday where you can only come if you wanna celebrate, at least it wasn't in my house. It really was open to anybody. And I love that about Passover.

Another thing that I guess rings a bell about Passover to me was that the Jews were, you know, enslaved and they were trapped and they weren't allowed to be themselves, and something about Passover that they escaped and got their freedom. And I just think it's telling because Passover is really about the freedom to be yourself.

GIGI RICHER

My name is Gigi Richer. I'm from Hastings, New York. I'm 16 years old. I'm a sophomore at Hastings High School. A part of the Passover holiday and the Passover story that really resonates with me is that when you sort of take away all of the labels of the Passover story, when you take away all of the like the supernatural God stuff, the parting of the Red Sea, the burning bush, what it boils down to is a really universal story. You know, a group of people realizes that the way they're being treated is unjust, they rise up, they rebel, they leave a hostile environment and they form their own community. And, huh, where have I heard that before? I think that really resonates with a lot of members of the LGBTQ+ community because that act of leaving a hostile environment and forming your own community parallels the experience of so many members of the LGBTQ+ community in so many ways.

I don't really have an exact question, but what I think about when I think about another question that I would add from an LGBTQ+ perspective is I think about heteronormativity, you know, why is this night different from all other nights? And then we have like why is this person different from all other people? They both establish one thing as the norm and another thing as like an outlier to be examined and analyzed. So if I were to add a question, it would be something like, "Why do we consider this night so strange? Why do we consider all other nights normal?"

I don't know if I would add anything to the Seder plate. I don't really know if LGBTQ+ inclusion has to be like a huge part of the Passover holiday. I don't think it needs to be like a rainbow flag on a Seder plate. But I think what would be nice is some recognition that the Passover story is not a thing of the past. Like what it boils down to is a story that is very universal that has showed up all over history. So a part of the Seder or the Passover celebration that recognizes like the nowness of the Passover story I think that would be a really great step. I'm trying to think of like a food that has been eaten all throughout history, because I guess that would symbolize how the Passover story has come up now, now again, as a pattern. I can't think of anything. Like bread, people eat bread a lot. I think I would have bread because just like being LGBTQ+ for so long has been considered wrong or against the rules. Breaking the rules, adding bread to the Seder plate I think that'd be a nice nod to that.

What comes to mind when I think of a Passover Seder memory that I really treasure is me and my sister were a little bit younger, I think that I was around like 10, and my family threw like a fun Seder, like they had a bunch of games. We built stuff out of like blocks. We tried to make matzah. And at one point, the doorbell rang and we answered it and it was my dad in like a robe and a wig and he pretended to be Elijah. Me and my sister were really young, so we didn't notice that he had left the table, and we totally weren't expecting it. So it was just such a surprise and it was so much fun. And looking back on all the Seders that I've been a part of, that's a really fun memory.

JOEL DAVIDSON

Hi, I'm Joel Davidson. And I am happy to do this interview. I think what resonates with me about the Seder plate is just the whole...the whole thing. It just represents the whole process of liberation and the journey that everyone has taken, the Israelites took getting out of Egypt, and kind of symbolizes for me in terms of LGBTQ, inclusion in the Passover Seder, is our journey of liberation over these past I'd say like 40, 50 years now and how far we've come.

I'm not sure if there's any one particular item on the Seder plate. Maybe the maror. I would say just it's the journey, you know? It's the whole process that kind of resonates with me. Nothing one particular thing stands out, but just the fact that it's a long journey, maybe it's the symbolism behind that. It took 40 years to get through the desert and to the land of Canaan. It's taken the gay community, LGBTQ community in America, at least 50 years since Stonewall to get to this point where we are, we're able to get married and to live a life in freedom. And we still have some setbacks, from time to time. We've just had a four year setback. And so I think it kind of symbolizes the journey that everyone takes, that we have a long journey to go, a path that we see, and that from time to time, we're gonna have some bumps in the road, we'll have some setbacks, some tears, but we have to continue that journey to get to where we need to go, to get to the Promised Land.

You know, I would say if I had to add a question to the Seder, I would probably ask, what is it that the Jewish experience informs us as LGBTQ members of the community? What is it that we can take from that experience and guide us, moving forward? I'm not sure if I have an activity necessarily, but you know, I'm a former history teacher, so I kind of liked the idea of having timelines. And I have seen timelines in other Haggadah, and you see the progression where things have taken place. I kind of wanna see a timeline of what LGBTQ Jews and the larger LGBT community has gone through over time to kind of see that pathway to the steps that have been taken along the journey of liberation. And I think that that would kind of help us see that it is a long struggle, but in the grand space of time, it might be a short struggle.

So I think with a timeline it would show memorable moments in history, pictures, historical pictures. So maybe, you know, in 1969, the year that I was born, you would see Stonewall for example, and what that looked like. And then, you know, whether it was Supreme Court decisions, the policy about gays in the military, the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, the Supreme Court decision that legalized gay marriage, the picture of the White House lit up in rainbow colors, the inclusion of transgender people in the military, and also when it was taken away and now re-imposed, that ability to serve openly, to see those kinds of things and see pictures of those historical moments, I think that would be an incredible visual way to see the progress that has been made along the journey.

My favorite Seder moment or experience, when I was a little kid, my mom always made mashed potatoes, oven baked mashed potatoes. They're the best in the world. And we had quite a number of people over for the Seder, and as she was walking in, she had her hand under the pan and she must've lost her balance, and she went to grab it and save it, smacked the center of the potatoes and in it, there was a huge indentation of her hand print. And, you know, everyone was a little bit worried and then we started making jokes about it. And everyone's...some people were saying, "I

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want the pinky finger," or, "I want the thumb." And to this day, my mom always makes a handprint on the potatoes, but she puts it in...before she bakes it, she puts in that handprint and it's become a new tradition at our family Seder and it's always a fun retelling of the experience.

I don't know if there's anything else to add. You know, I think when it comes to the Jewish community in general and the LGBTQ community, when you think about the civil rights movement and the African-American community, there's so many things in common that we have with one another and shared experiences that we can only learn from each other from these experiences. And so learning the history, the retelling it, even though we know the story from year to year, it continues to remind us and continues to make us aware of our responsibility to continue telling the story, and to continue making sure that we become a more free and just people, whether it's LGBTQ, African-American, Jewish, whatever group, the goal is to, you know, to pursue justice, to pursue freedom, to pursue understanding and knowledge. And ultimately I think that that just brings us more understanding of one another's and our shared experiences. And hopefully that helps us literally break bread, break the matzah, break the challah, whatever it is, that we can come together and share meals together and share experiences, and then ultimately become friends with one another. And I think that that's...that's kind of the large overarching lesson of all of this.

KADIJA SPENCE

Hi. My name's Kadija, and I currently live in Harlem. I am a student at JTS, doing a certificate program, and will graduate in May. Okay. So as a member of the LGBTQ community, these items on the Seder plate don't resonate with me at all. So I know that some people do add an orange to represent the LGBTQ community, but I don't really think it speaks to the community as a whole, because it's not something we collectively decided on. Susannah Heschel, who is the daughter of Rabbi Heschel, she added the orange on the Seder plate for the LGBTQ community, but it's not something that was necessarily, like, agreed upon or something that was well known when she first did it. And if I could, I would say it's not the Seder plate that resonates with me, it is the story of Passover itself.

So we all know that the Israelites are leaving Egypt, but it's more of the concept that they're leaving Egypt in haste. They want their freedom so badly that they're just, like, only packing essentials, and, like, whatever it is that they forget, like, they're just leaving it anyway. And I feel like that, for me, resonates the most, because I used to live with my mom, and I felt like I couldn't really express who I was and be in the relationship that I wanted to be while I was home as someone that identifies as a demisexual and a lesbian. That was pretty problematic while I was home.

And so, like, the first time I got to move out, I was very excited, and I left in a haste and, unfortunately, had to move right back home after I did. And I just feel like even though the Israelites didn't go back to Egypt, they began to think about, like, "Oh no, I think I regret freedom." And, like, they panicked. They didn't have anyone telling them what to do every single day. Like, they would be able to finally wake up in the morning and not have to, like, go pick straw and make bricks and lift bricks. And, like, it was a routine. And I just felt like, just like they weren't ready for freedom, I definitely wasn't ready for freedom. I left the house and I was like, "Yeah. This is gonna be great. I'm on my own. I'm, like, finally gonna get to be my own person." And it was a lot tougher than I thought it would be. I, like, also wasn't really sure of what I wanted to do in life and what my, like, purpose was.

So I am glad that it wasn't problematic when I moved back home. But like the children of Israel when they were on their journey for 40 years...thankfully, it didn't take me 40 years after I moved back to my mom's house. It only took me a year to finally figure out what freedom would look like for me, what living on my own would look like for me, what being in a same-sex gender relationship would look like for me. And, like, I really took the time to actually ask myself all of those questions before I moved out the second time. So currently where I am now, I am living on my own. I do have a roommate. I am in a same-sex relationship and, like, I just feel like when we move so quickly to wanna get freedom and we don't actually think about what the unseen consequences are of it, that's where I really resonate with Passover and the whole experience as a whole, is just thinking about what happens when you get the thing you finally want and what you do with it is what makes the difference.

And I think that learning from the children of Israel, that along the way, you're gonna complain, along the way, you're gonna be hungry. Along the way, you're gonna wanna cry and wish that you had never left in the first place. You're gonna realize that it's super hard and not as fun as you

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thought it would be in the first place. And then eventually when you get to the spot where you're accepting yourself as part of the LGBTQ community and also as part of a community of where you're finding your own self, whatever secondary community that is, that when you get to that point, that is your true freedom.

So it's not the idea or all the steps in between. It's when you finally get that sense of community and sense of who you are, that is the freedom that you're actually working towards. Like when the children of Israel are able to be in their own land and, like, celebrate their own holidays and have their own culture, like, that is the freedom. That is the freedom that we want as the LGBTQ community. Like, we want to be able to celebrate Pride month, we want to be able to get married. We wanna be able to adopt kids. Like, we wanna be able to walk down the street and not have people give us weird looks. Like, we want those things. We want our own culture. We want our own sense of pride. Yeah. So that's what resonates with me when it comes to Passover.

Yeah. I love that question. So I was radical and I said I wouldn't add anything to the four questions as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I would actually change them all together. I was like, "If you're giving me a chance to truly make my own Passover experience, yeah, I'm gonna be radical. I'm just gonna change the questions altogether." And the questions I would ask would be questions to help someone who is in that transitional phase or in the process of looking for a community or people to talk to that also identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. So the first question I would ask is, like, "What is your notion of freedom? So what is it that you really want at the end of your LGBTQ+ experience? Like, what is it that you really want to say that, 'This is what I have gained from being my whole self?'" That's the first question.

And I think that should be the first question, regardless of whether it's designing a Seder or not. Because had I asked myself that question before I just rushed into moving out, yeah, I think I would have taken my time to move out and not had to do a repeat of it. And then the second question I would ask is, "Do you know where to find your community?" And then, like, part B of that question is, "What resources or what connections do you need in order to find your community?" So just getting someone to think through their process and also ask themselves tough questions. I think it's easier when someone else is asking you the tough questions rather than when you're asking yourself it, because when you're asking yourself it, you actually have to sit down, take space, be quiet, and think, which can be very, very difficult, especially when making a life decision or a life change.

The third question I would ask is, "Who do you wanna surround yourself with for this journey?" And then part B of that is, "Who is gonna celebrate your experience with you?" So not only thinking about your larger community, but your intimate community, like who do you want with you on this journey and who is actually gonna celebrate with you? And then my fourth question would be, "What do you need in order to sustain your new self?" Like, "What is it that you need to keep being you?" Yeah. So those would be my four questions. And then, at the end of it, just having an affirmation to close off the four questions, knowing that I am me, I was created the way I needed to be created, I am loved the way I need to be loved, and I show love the way I need to

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show love. So just having that affirmation after doing all of that self-reflection and connecting with others.

Yeah. So after I thought about it, I said, whatever someone of the LGBTQ community adds to their Seder plate has to be special to them, it has to be meaningful to them. I think that's the only way to really encapsulate your own personal experience and your own personal journey within the LGBTQ+ community. And so, for me, I would add a hibiscus flower. And I would add a hibiscus flower for two reasons, one to highlight the triumphs and tragedies of trans black women because they were truly pioneers within the Stonewall riots within the early LGBTQ+ movement within making sure that African-Americans and Hispanics and other people of color got access to medicine and treatment when the AIDS outbreak was huge among the gay community. And I just don't think they get enough credit. So I would add a hibiscus flower to represent all of the black trans women, all of their speeches, all of their marches, all of the awards that they're now winning, the progress that they're making, not only in the media, but also in the arts and science and math, and just taking over spaces where originally they were closed out to, because one, they were people of color, and two, they were within the LGBTQ+ community.

And two women, in particular, I would highlight are Marsha P. Johnson and Miss Sylvia Rivera who...they were best friends when they were alive and marched together and hung out together, and both really loved flowers. So I think having a hibiscus flower, they would be very proud to have that symbol represent them.

Honestly, I don't remember Passover last year. I know I spent it with my mom, and I wanna say that was pretty special. Like, 2020 was such a rough year. I would have to say it was the Passover 2019. So two years ago would be my special memory of Passover. I did celebrate it with my mom. I think it was very meaningful because I actively chose to celebrate it with her. So at the time, I was still living at grad school, which was upstate. So I actually chose to come down to Westchester and, like, have Passover with her and share that experience with her. And I think what made it so special is that, at this point, one, it was my choice to celebrate a Jewish holiday. And two, that, at that point, I felt like I needed to figure out where my place is within Judaism and also being queer.

So, like, this was a kind of like a mash-up of me celebrating holidays at school with liberal, some queer, Jews, and then also going back home to my, like, very conservative Caribbean mom who also happens to be Jewish. So I think that Passover, in particular, was pretty special because it just showed me that I can have this dynamic in my life and not have to give up one or the other, which was pretty solidifying for me now that I'm, like, out to some of my family members and my friends now, and I found a synagogue where, like, I attend Zoom services with, and, like, they're very welcoming of people from the LGBTQ+ community. Yeah. So I think Passover of 2019 solidified it for me. I can both still have a relationship with my religious Caribbean mom and then also still have this identity of being Jewish and queer without having it conflict. Yeah.

No. I would sum it up and say, as I celebrate the holidays more in my, like, queer identity, that, like, it might change, and I might have some new insight, and that excites me. But at the moment, no, there's nothing additional I'd like to say.

NADAV SHACHMON

I'm the Westchester shaliach. I've been in Westchester for the last two and a half years. The holiday of Pesach resonates with me as an LGBT member because of the essence of the story. We're talking about a story of freedom. Jewish people were slaves and they got free. They got released. And I think this is the story of, at least, of how I look at my own identity as an LGBT member that was, you know, in the closet for many, many years. And I think us as a community, as in the LGBT community, we were in the closet. Some of us still are in the closet, and this story of freedom is a story that inspires me as a Jew, but also as a gay guy that got out of the closet, and that needs to remember that not...not to be ashamed of who he is.

If I wanna add any question to the four questions. So the four question is this part when we are, right, "Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?" when in every night we're doing something, but in Pesach, we're doing it differently. And I think one of the things that I would maybe offer to add is that every night we always try to differentiate between female and male. In Hebrew it's even worse, sh'lah, shlach, and we look at the world from a very, you know, binary way like female and male. Maybe tonight, the night of Pesach, we will try to look at things without that perspective. I think one of the things that we often...maybe resonates with me and often add to the Seder plate is the orange. And traditionally orange was not part of the Seder plate, but it's been added later to represent the female equality and the idea is that also women should and could be a part of the ceremonies and part of Judaism just as equal as men.

And I truly believe that equal rights for LGBTs will come when first there is going to be equal rights for females, for women. And I think this is the beginning, whether it's in Judaism or whether it's in our society. So that's part of the essence of Pesach. I actually would not go back...if I wanna add any stories to the Pesach service, I would not go back too long ago and to such different countries. I would go back to earlier in the previous century and here in New York and I would share the story of Stonewall. And I think the story of Stonewall is the beginning of the liberation of the LGBT community. And I think it's very appropriate to share this story around the Seder table because it's, again, the liberation of...the beginning of freedom of so many people, that we all...all of us, the LGBT members, are feeling the implications of that and the benefits of that. One of the memories that I have when I was a little kid in our family, you know, the afikoman is not hidden. There's not this game that you have to find the afikoman. The afikoman is actually being tied to the youngest in the family. And the game that the rest of the grandchildren is that they need to steal it from him. Now I'm the youngest. So I remember that during the Seder, when my grandpa used to split the matzah, and used to wrap it in a cover, in this like cloth, and used to tie it to either my arm or my leg, and all night of the Seder, I used to sit like this with the afikoman to make sure no one steals this from me. And you know, it was just a game between me and the rest of the grandchildren, and it's a long night, but it made it very memorable for me.

I think the LGBTQ status in the world, and particularly in Israel needs to be still addressed. And there are many things that need to be changed. And I can say at least about Israel that even though in Israel, things are okay, they're not good enough, and I think Pesach should also remind us our goals as a community of what we wanna achieve. And the road is still long. We did not get to where we wanna go yet, but we're definitely, definitely on the way. And I think that's part of the messages that can come from the Seder if we want to add it through LGBT kind of thing.

RABBI BEN GOLDBERG

Hello, my name is Rabbi Ben Goldberg, and I serve Congregation KTI in Port Chester, New York. I think what resonates about the Passover holiday for me, as a member of the LGBTQ community, is the whole notion, at the core of the holiday, that existing in a Mitzraim, in a narrow, confined place...Mitzraim, that's what Egypt is...that existing in that narrow, confined place is no way to live, and that God can help bring us out from constriction to liberation, as we say in the Haggadah. And so that was true for our ancestors all those years ago in Egypt, but I think it's also true for us as members of the LGBTQ community who have often needed to exist in a narrow, confined place where we can't really be ourselves and that Pesach is an example for us of how God can help us move from constriction to liberation.

So, I would add to the four questions the following. I would ask, "How is my family different from all other families, and yet how is it also the same?" I think, while there are obviously some very big differences between my family and most other families, I think, at the core, it's the same. It's based on love. It's based on celebrating Judaism. It's based on passing traditions down from one generation to the next, about being in community, and it's really so similar to all other families, even though there are obviously some pretty significant differences, as well.

So, to be quite honest, I don't love the idea of continuing to add things to the Pesach table. I sometimes feel we end up with the entire produce section on the table, and I much prefer to let the traditional symbols speak for themselves and perhaps to give them some new meanings rather than continuing to add and to add and to add.

That said, last year, at the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have a tambourine, and I put that on the seder table, which is a reminder of Miriam and the other women, who, according to tradition, in that chaotic night when they left Egypt, they remembered to pack tambourines with them so they could use them to celebrate once they crossed the sea. And it's a reminder that was very important last year, but I think it's always important that even during difficult and uncertain times, even during chaotic times, we can start to gather what we're gonna need for when things get better, and we can plan for better times even when things are really difficult now. And I think that's a message from the Passover story that resonates for lots of people, but in particular for the LGBTQ community of looking forward to better times and looking forward to that moment of liberation and the joy and the celebration that will come with it.

So, I've been to a number of really memorable seders in my life, some with family, some with friends, some with people I didn't really know at all. But what I think makes a seder good and what makes it memorable, any seder, is that the people there are eager to participate, who wanna dive into the texts and to the rituals and to have real discussion about themselves and their lives and the themes of the holiday, as opposed to just sort of sitting through it politely until it's time to eat. To me, that's really the key to a good seder is having people who really wanna be there and really are willing to bring of themselves and to engage and to participate in the conversation. Because that's really what a seder is supposed to be. It's a structured conversation. And, so, to have people who really wanna do that is, I think, the key to making a seder good.

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So, I think the most fun I've ever had at a Passover seder was one I attended with my brother and sister-in-law, who were both cantors, at the house of a teacher of theirs, who was also a cantor. And it was extremely musical. There was a two-hour rehearsal beforehand with sheet music, where everyone reviewed everything. And there were maybe 30 or 40 people around the table singing all of this Passover music that they had accumulated throughout the years. And that was just a whole lot of fun, and I didn't really know anyone there other than my brother and my sister-in-law, but it was still just a tremendous amount of fun to do a seder that way.