

Talking About Food Justice

March 2012

The Boston Workmen's Circle prides itself in its active engagement in and conversation about challenging political issues and in its commitment to *tikkun olam*, healing the world. As many of you are aware, in the last few years, the shankbone on the seder plate has triggered a passionate and vibrant conversation about food justice and the treatment of animals. We recently shared a *kumsitz* on the topic, and the discussion will continue within the WC community as we explore this complex subject in the context of our rituals and community gatherings.

Food justice can refer to a broad range of topics, including planting organic seeds, maintaining a fertile and healthy soil, treating animals with consideration and compassion, respecting the health and welfare of farm workers, protecting the environment, and building a food system that is safe and affordable for all.

We see a diverse response to food justice questions within our own community. Some people focus on eating locally grown organic food, some buy only free range or grass fed meat, chicken or eggs, some choose not to eat meat at all, some eat fish, and some prefer to avoid all animal products. Some people find working on the broader environmental issues is the most productive focus, others direct their energies towards a diet that is free from violence towards any animals.

When we come to the seder plate, there is obviously no consensus. Some WC members feel that the shank bone is a strong Passover symbol and tradition that ties us to our ancestors and connects us to our Jewish community, evoking the Passover story, images of sacrifice, death, and liberation. Others feel that it is unthinkable to kill or eat an animal and are uncomfortable with having a shank bone on the holiday table. And then there is everyone in between. Clearly this is a work in process!

This year we have chosen to acknowledge the traditional importance of the shank bone while also respecting the beliefs of those who object to its presence. Shule students have made symbolic bones for the seder plate and there is a beet which bleeds red, reminding us of the paschal lamb and the environmental, ecological, and moral struggles that surround any discussion of how we feed ourselves. The eggs remain as a symbol of spring and rebirth and are from free range chickens.

We encourage you to continue these conversations during the seder meal, in your homes, and in our community. Please feel free to share your thoughts and suggestions on the last page of the Haggadah.

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