



Emotionally - Can I Do Pesach This Year? **The impact child abuse can have on survivors**

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With Pesach (Passover) less than a week away many Jewish incest survivors are faced with the dilemma of trying to figure out what they are going to do for the holiday. For many survivors it's much too dangerous to go home because they fear the risk of emotional and or physical harm. The truth is that other incest survivors may not even be invited home after confronting family members with their childhood abuse.

What I'm going to share with you is quite personal. I also know that I am not the only one facing these sorts of dilemmas and for the sake of helping other's I'm going to share my experience with you. Please remember, if you are an incest survivor or a survivor of any other form of child abuse -- you are not alone, nor are you to blame for the physical, emotional or sexual offenses committed against you as a child or as an adult.

I'll be honest with you, I am one of those incest survivors who do not spend the holiday with my family. I haven't done so since I left my childhood home in my late teens.

There have been many years where I would invite survivors who were my friends to my home and we would do a mock seder, using the [Survivors Hagaddah](#). There were other years in which it was just too painful for me to even consider doing Pesach at all.

Over the last ten years I did my best to reintroduce the holiday into my life. I was fortunate enough to be included in seder's at my rabbis' home. I'll never

forget the first year I was invited. I was terrified to go. You see, for me, Passover was a holiday that was filled with memories of abuse. I couldn't even imagine being a part of it, yet my rabbi heard my pain and listened to my memories of my childhood horror. My rabbi told me that it would be OK, and that at any time I could leave -- but to just come to see what a "real orthodox seder" was like.



Prior to going we went over everything that would happen, so that there were no surprises. He also told me that I would be sitting up close to him, so that he would be there to keep me safe, just in case I got scared, and that at anytime I could pull him aside to talk with him.

I remember arriving for that first seder. Many of his family members were there. I felt out of place, yet everyone made me feel at home. The seder itself was beautiful. I had no idea that how beautiful the davening and bracha's (prayers and blessings) could be, nor did I know that my rabbis family members were so gifted with their voices and the harmony was amazing. I felt as if I was at a concert.

Each Passover since that first time I've been invited to my rabbis home. Each year was filled with the same amount of stress and fear. As much as I want to say that I've worked through my flashbacks of this holiday, some of the sadness and pain remain.

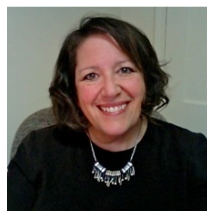
This year will be quite different for me. You see, back in July I was assaulted by my rabbis brother. I made a police report, charges were pressed and he was found guilty of second degree assault, fourth degree sexual

assault. The judge gave the offender a slap on the hand with the sentence of PBJ (Probation Before Judgement). Meaning, if the offender behaves, after a year the record disappears.

I was warned that if I made a police report against my offender, that my rabbi would have no other options but to sever ties with me. It took me thirty-three days to make the police report. I feared losing the "family connection" I had with my rabbi and his family. I was told by my rabbi "to find a way to heal without making a police report". I personally could not do that. I went without sleep. How could I not do what I've suggested other people do? I also knew that if my rabbi's sixty-four year old brother (who is a retired college professor and a man with rabbinic ordination) could assault me -- the odds were that he had assaulted other women in the past. I feared he would do it again in the future.

I know my dilemma is one that is faced by many survivors of sex crimes. I made the report and lost more than just friends. I lost a family that made me feel safe enough to do Jewish holidays.

As the days approach and Pesach is upon us, I realize the impact that the assault had on me once again. This year I am not in the place to clean my home for the holiday, nor am I in a place to go to a seder. I need to honor myself and do as I have told others -- that as Jewish survivors of incest we need to do what is necessary to survive. We need to be good and kind to ourselves and if we are not in a place emotionally, that it's OK. I'm sure that in future years I'll be able to reconnect, yet just as many other incest survivors may decide -- this year I need to honor and respect myself and the freedom I have to choose.



Vicki Polin, MA, LCPC is the founder and director of The Awareness Center, which is the international Jewish Coalition Against Sexual Assault. She is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor with over twenty-five years of experience working in the sexual trauma field.