**The Passover Ceremony**

**Beginning of the Service**

Leader: Shalom! Welcome to the Passover

All: Peace and Blessing.

**Opening Comment**

Leader: Today we celebrate the oldest festival in the Jewish calendar. The Jewish Passover took place in Egypt thousands of years ago. The story is told in the book of Exodus (Ch 12). The Jewish book of law or Torah tells the Jewish people that they have a duty to tell the Passover story to the next generation. Century after century, Jewish families have celebrated this Feast with their friends and relatives.

**The Ceremony**

1. **The lighting of the Candles**

All: Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has taught us the way of holiness through your commandments which includes kindling the Passover candles. May their brightness and warmth bring joy and hope to us all. We thank you, Lord, for keeping us alive and in good health so that we may be able to celebrate this festive day.

1. **The Kiddush and First Cup of Wine**

Leader: We have come together to celebrate the oldest holiday on the Jewish Calendar. During this Seder service we shall retell the thrilling story of our ancestors’ going out from slavery to freedom. As we remember this moving chapter in our people’s past, may we learn to appreciate more deeply the freedom we enjoy. May we also learn to care about those who are not yet free. May we join in working for the day when all people everywhere shall be free from tyranny, from poverty and from war.

In gratitude to God, who wants all people to be free, and who has put a love of freedom in our hearts, we rise to recite the Kiddush over the first of the 4 cups of wine.

**ALL STAND AS THE CUPS ARE FILLED WITH WINE AND HELD FOR BLESSING. ELIJAH’S CUP IS ALSO FILLED. (Don’t it drink yet.)**

All: Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. You have chosen us from all peoples, and have blessed us with your commandments. You have given us this day of the festival of the unleavened bread to celebrate our freedom.

**ALL DRINK THE FIRST CUP (the cup of sanctification)**

1. **THE WASHING OF HANDS IN SILENCE (a custom of cleansing)**
2. **EATING OF THE KARPAS**

Leader: We take a green vegetable which symbolises the coming of spring and the rebirth of hope. We dip the vegetable in the salt water which reminds us of the bitter tears our ancestors shed when they were slaves. They were able to survive their ordeal because they dared to hope that one day God would help them to become free.

All: Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the earth.

**ALL EAT THE KAPAS DIPPED IN SALT WATER**

1. **YACHATZ**

**ONE OF THE MATZAH’S IS BROKEN** (one half is returned to the plate and the other becomes the Afikoman and is hidden for the children to find at the end of the meal.)

1. **MAGID *(The telling of the story)***

**THE 4 QUESTIONS ARE ASKED**

Child 1: Why is this night different from all other nights? On other nights we eat bread; why on this night only Matzah?

Leader: It is the night of our deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. It is the night of flight. There was little time for cooking with yeast.

It is a night where we put aside the burden of sin and put on a life without sin lived in wholeness. (Matzah means ‘sweet without sourness’.) We are starting out afresh from the slavery of our past to become a new holy nation.

Child 2: On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, why on this night do we only eat bitter herbs?

Leader/Other: Yehweh Himself has commanded us to do this in rememberence (Exodus 12:8). Bitterness in the scripture speaks of death and mourning. Our bitterness was under the taskmaster’s whips while in slavery. We shared also the sacrificing of our young lambs so that our firstborn may be redeemed and live.

Child 3: On all other nights we need not dip any food into another even once; why on this night are we asked to dip twice – the green vegetables into the salt water and the bitter herbs into the Haroset?

Leader/other: The green vegetables are spring symbols of hope while in affliction (salt water). In Egypt we lived a life of dryness and hard labour. The bitter herbs in Haroset are like the mixture of the mortar and brick we made while working in the fields.

Child 4: On all other nights we dine sitting upright; why on this night do we all recline?

Leader/other: In ancient days, slaves ate hurriedly because their maters did not wish them to waste a single moment when they could be working. And so slaves ate either standing up or squatting on the ground. The masters, however, ate leisurely in a relaxed mood as they reclined on couches. Since our ancestors became free on this festival, how natural that we should eat in the manner of free men.

This night is indeed different from other nights of the year because on this night we act out one of the greatest dramas in Jewish history – the exodus from Egypt. The foods we eat, the rituals and practises we perform, the songs we sing and the prayers we offer – all make that exciting story come alive for us. The story of the Exodus gives us hope because it reminds us that God cares about the oppressed and helps them achieve freedom. Passover is not merely an event which happened thousands of years ago, but one which every Jew in every age celebrates.

**THE STORY OF THE EXODUS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE**

The story of Passover recounts how the Hebrews gained their freedom and became the ancestors of the Jewish people.

At the end of the biblical book of Genesis, Joseph brings his family to Egypt. Over the following centuries, the descendants of Joseph's family (the Hebrews) become so numerous that when a new king comes to power he fears what might happen if the Hebrews decide to rise against the Egyptians. He decides that the best way to avoid this situation is to enslave them (Exodus 1). As Hebrews continue to have many children, their numbers grow, and pharaoh comes up with another plan: he will send soldiers to kill all newborn male babies who were born to Hebrew mothers. This is where the story of Moses begins.

In order to save Moses from the grisly fate pharaoh has decreed, his mother and sister put him in a basket and set it afloat on the river. Their hope is that the basket will float to safety and whomever finds the baby will adopt him as their own. By a strange twist of events, he was raised in the Pharaoh’s palace as a prince of Egypt. But when Moses saw the suffering of the Israelite slaves and he felt pain in his heart for them. One day, when he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating an Israelite slave, Moses could not control his anger and he killed the Egyptian. Then Moses flees for his life, heading into the desert. He then became a shepherd. One day, while out tending the sheep, Moses meets God in the wilderness. The voice of God calls out to him from a burning bush and Moses answers: "Here I am!".

God tells Moses that he has been chosen to free the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Moses is not sure he can carry out this command. But God reassures Moses that he will have help in the form of God's aide and his brother, Aaron.

Leader: We now lift our cups of grape juice and we thank God for His faithfulness in keeping His promise to our people.

EVERYONE HOLDS THEIR CUPS SAYING:

All: Blessed is He who keeps His promise to Israel.

Leader: Moses returned to Egypt and demanded that pharaoh release the Hebrews from bondage, saying “Let my people go.” Pharaoh refused and as a result God sends ten plagues upon Egypt. As we mention each of the plagues, remove a drop of wine from your cup using your fingertip. Although this night is one of salvation, we cannot be completely joyour when some of God’s creatures had to suffer. Although the Egyptians were our enemies and enslaved us, we still feel their pain and suffering during the plagues. They too were human beings, children of the same God.

1. Blood - The waters of Egypt are turned to blood. All the fish die and water becomes unusable.

2. Frogs

3. Vermin

4. Wild animals

5. Cattle Disease

6. Boils - The Egyptian people are plagued by painful boils that cover their bodies.

7. Hail - Severe weather destroys Egyptian crops and beats down upon them.

8. Locusts - Locusts swarm Egypt and eat any remaining crops and food.

9. Darkness - Darkness covers the land of Egypt for three days.

10. Death of the Firstborn - The firstborn of every Egyptian family is killed. Even the firstborn of Egyptian animals die.

Leader: The story of the plagues contains a reminder and a warning to all nations. When they oppress any of their people, when they show no concern for human beings, when they do not care about human suffering, they are prepared for destruction. A nation which wants to grow and prosper must grant ‘liberty and justice for all’.

(After the tenth plague pharaoh relents and releases the Hebrews. The quickly bake their bread, not even pausing for the dough to rise, which is why Jews eat matzah (unleavened bread) during Passover.

Soon after they leave their homes pharaoh changes his mind and sends soldiers after the Hebrews, but when the former slaves reach the Sea of Reeds the waters part so that they can escape. When the soldiers try to follow them, the waters crash down upon them. Once the Hebrews crossed the water, the Hebrews begin the next part of their journey as they search for the Promised Land.)

**HOLD SECOND CUP OF WINE AND RECITE BLESSING**

Leader: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe who created the fruit of the vine.

**ALL DRINK THE SECOND CUP**

1. **WASHING OF HANDS**

Leader: Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the washing of hands.

1. **MOTZI MATZAH: Blessing over the matzah**

Leader: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe who brought forth bread from the earth.

EVERYONE IS GIVEN A SMALL PIECE OF MATZAH & EATS IT

1. **MAROR: THE BITTER HERBS**

Leader: Let us now take the bitter herbs, dip them into the Haroset, and say:

All: Praised are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has taught us the way of holiness through your commandments and has commanded us to eat bitter herbs.

ALL EAT THE MAROR DIPPED IN HAROSET

1. **KOREKH: THE SANDWICH**

All: Now we repeat the practice of Hillel, the great Rabbi who lived in the days of the second temple in Jerusalem. He would eat Matzah and Maror together with the Passover lamb. In that way he fulfilled the Torah’s command: ‘They shall eat the Passover lamb together with Matzah and Maror.’

THE LEADER BREAKS THE BOTTOM MATZAH. EACH PERSON TAKES TWO PIECES AND PLACES SOME BITTER HERBS BETWEEN THEM.

ALL EAT THE HILLEL SANDWICH

1. **SHULCHAN OREKH: Dinner**

People would now eat the festive meal. Traditionally it begins with the charred egg on the Seder plate.

1. **TZAFUN: THE AFIKOMEN**

Search for the piece of Matzah that was set aside earlier. Each person receives a small piece of matso to be eaten as the last food for the meal.

1. **BAREKH: Grace after Meals**

POUR AND HOLD 3rd CUP OF GRAPE JUICE.

All: Praised are You, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, God of the fruit of the vine.

ALL DRINK THIRD CUP (the cup of blessing)

**THE CUP OF ELIJAH**

Leader: On our Seder table, is a large cup of wine which none of us has touched. We have reserved it for a special guest. His name is Elijah, the Prophet. He was a man of great courage who fought for what is right and just. According to tradition, Elijah never died. One day he will return to announce the arrival for a time when all men and women will live in peace and treat each other with kindness and love.

THE DOORS ARE OPENED (to greet Elijah). ALL PAUSE AND WAIT TO SEE IF ELIJAH IS COMING. THE DOORS ARE CLOSED (if he has not arrived).

1. **THE HALLEL: Praises**

Leader: Therefore, it is our duty to thank and praise Him who performed all these miracles for our ancestors and for us. He brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of grief into joy. Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!

People would sing specific songs and Psalms about Passover.

**THE 4th CUPS ARE FILLED AND HELD**

Leader: Before we drink the 4th and last cup of wine, let us understand why we drink 4 cups of wine at the Seder.

When God sent Moses to the Israelites in Egypt, He told them that God had seen their misery, had heard their cries and was ready to bring them out of slavery.

“I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians”

“I will deliver you from their bondage”

“I will redeem you with an outstretched arm”

“I will take you to be My people”

Let us now take the 4th cup of wine and say together:

All: Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of fruit of the vine.

**ALL DRINK THE FINAL CUP (the cup of acceptance)**

Leader: There remains on the table a 5th cup of wine – Elijah’s cup – and a 5th promise: “I will bring you back to the land of your fathers.”

1. **NIRTZAH: Closing**

Leader: As we come to the end of our Passover meal we pray that we may celebrate it again together next year in joy, in freedom and in peace.

All: Next year in Jerusalem! Amen. Alleluia.

**EXPLAINATION OF SYMBOLS**

The Lamb Bone

It is a reminder of the Passover Lamb which our ancestors ate on the very first Passover. During the plague of the death of the firstborn, Jews were told to put the blood of the lamb on their doors so that the Angel of Death would ‘PASS OVER’ their houses. This is where the Jewish holiday of Passover derives its name. In every age we must remember that freedom and sacrifice go together. If we want to remain free we must be ready to pay for that freedom.

The Matzah

It is a reminder of the flat baked dough that our ancestors ate as they fled from Egypt. In their haste to leave Egypt, they did not wait for the dough to rise. It also reminds us that we too should not delay using the opportunity to do a good deed.

The Bitter Herbs (radish)

Maror, in Hebrew means ‘bitter’. It reminds us of how bitter the Egyptians made the lives of our ancestors. They enslaved them and treated them harshly. It also helps us to put ourselves in the place of those who suffer. The Maror reminds us that we must care about other people.