

Seder Meal Liturgy

SANCTIFICATION OF THE FESTIVAL

Commentator: The central theme of the Passover is redemption. For us Passover means not only the physical exodus from Egypt, but our spiritual passing over from the bondage of sin as well. The aim of the Seder on this night of the Passover is to bring the events and miracles of the past deliverance from Egypt into the present, so that each of us gathered here feels as though we had personally come out of bondage. We are asked to bear witness to God's redeeming action in the past, to act in conformity with his will in the present, and to renew our hope in further redemption.

KADESH, SANCTIFICATION OF THE DAY

Leader/Father: We gather for this sacred celebration in the presence of loved ones and friends with the signs of festive rejoicing around us. Together with the whole house of Israel, both young and old are linking the past with future; we respond in faith to God's call to service; we gather here to observe the Passover, as it is written:

All: "The feast of unleavened bread must be kept, because it was on that same day I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Keep that day from age to age..." (Ex. 12:17)

Opening Song: (An appropriate song can be used here.)

LIGHTING OF THE FESTIVE CANDLES

Woman/Mother present: In praising God we say that all life is sacred. In kindling these festive lights, we are reminded of life's sanctity. With every holy candle we light, the world is brightened to a higher harmony. We praise you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe who hallow our lives with commandments and bid us to light these festive holy lights. (She lights the Festive Candles.)

THE KIDDUSH, THE FIRST CUP

Commentator: We have blessed this day in the "Kadesh," and called to mind the holiness of this festival commanded by the Lord. The candles we have lighted praise God for the holiness of all life.

Now let us prepare to drink the first, the Kiddush, or cup of sanctification. Traditionally, four times during the meal wine is taken, recalling the four terms in the Exodus story which describe God's action in rescuing the Israelites: "I brought out...I saved...I delivered...I redeemed." We bless the wine and every food which is eaten, and every action which takes place, as a gesture of thanksgiving to the Creator of all things. (The Leader pours wine for all.)

Leader/Father: Our history teaches us that in varied ways and in different words God gave promises of freedom to our people. With cups of wine we recall each one of them, as now the first:

All: "I am Yahweh. I will free you from the burdens which the Egyptians lay on you." (Ex. 6:6)

Leader/Father: (All raise wine glasses) We raise the Kiddush cup, and proclaim the holiness of the Day of Deliverance.

All: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who have kept us in life, sustained us, and brought us to this session of joy! (All drink the first cup.)

KARPAS--REBIRTH AND RENEWAL

Commentator: In the springtime each year, the season of rebirth and renewal, we read from the Song of Songs. This poetry of nature and of love recalls for us the love between God and the people of Israel, and their covenant relationship. The parsley (or other green herb) symbolizes the growth of springtime, and is a sign of hope and renewal.

Leader/Father: "See, winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The season of glad songs has come..." (Song 2:10-12). (Each person takes some greens and dips them twice in salt water.)

All: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the earth! (The greens are now eaten.)

YAHATZ--A BOND FORMED BY SHARING

Commentator: The leader breaks the middle matzah on his plate, wraps the larger half in a cloth, and conceals it as the "*afikoman*." This matzah is later shared as the final food of the Seder, but now serves as a visible reminder of the hidden Messiah whose appearance is expectantly awaited.

Leader/Father: (While breaking the middle matzah) This is the bread of affliction, the poor bread which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in want share in the hope of Passover. As we celebrate here, we join with people everywhere. This year we celebrate here. Next year in the land of Israel. Now we are still enslaved. Next year may we all be free.

MATZAH, MAROR, HAROSET (The first of the leader's three matzot is broken and distributed.)

All: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who bring forth bread from the earth. We praise you, who hallow our lives with commandments, and have commanded us regarding the eating of matzah and maror.

Commentator: *Matzah* is used to recall the fact that the dough used by the fleeing Israelites had no time to rise before the act of redemption.

Maror, the top of the horseradish root, symbolizes the bitterness of the past suffering of the Jews in Egypt.

Haroset is a mixture of apples, spices, wine and nuts. and symbolizes the mortar the Jews used in carrying out the Pharaoh's labor.

According to ancient custom, maror and haroset are eaten between two pieces of matzot. Break the piece of matzah on your plate in half and place some maror and haroset between.

All: In each of these elements we see the symbols of our story: the matzah of freedom, the maror of slavery, the haroset of toil. For in the time of bondage there is hope of redemption, and in the time of freedom, there is knowledge of servitude. (All eat the matzah, maror, and haroset.)

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

The youngest person now asks the four traditional questions, which serve as an introduction to the Scripture. The questions are asked by the youngest, because each generation is obligated to make the Exodus its own, and because the parent is obligated by Scripture to recount for his or her children what the Lord has done for them.

Youngest present (5th Grader): Why does this night differ from all other nights? On all other nights we eat leavened bread; why on this night only matzah? On all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs; why on this night only bitter herbs? On all other nights we do not dip our herbs at all; why on this night must we dip them twice? On all other nights we eat in an ordinary manner; why on this night do we dine with special ceremony?

MAGGID--THE NARRATION

There are many questions to answer. Now we begin to respond to them. Our history moves from slavery toward freedom.

All: We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord freed us with a mighty hand. Had the Lord not delivered us from Egypt, we, our children, and children's children would still be enslaved.

Leader/Father: Therefore, even if all of us were wise, if all of us were a people of understanding, and learned in the law and the prophets, it would still be our obligation to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Anyone who searches deeply into its meaning is considered praiseworthy.

All: Our redemption is not yet complete.

Leader/Father: (As the leader lifts the paschal lamb, he or she asks...) What is the meaning of the pasch?

Participant/All: This pasch represents the paschal lamb which our ancestors sacrificed to the Lord in memory of the night on which the Holy One passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. As it is written: "And when your children ask you, 'What does this ritual mean?' you will tell them, 'It is the sacrifice of the Passover in honor of Yahweh who passed over the houses of the sons and daughters of Israel in Egypt, but spared our houses!'" (Ex. 12:26-27). (The leader holds up the upper piece of unleavened bread.)

Leader/Father: What is the meaning of the unleavened bread?

Participant/All: It is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors took with them out of Egypt. For, as it is written: "They baked cakes with the dough which they had brought from Egypt, unleavened because they had been driven out of Egypt with no time for dallying, and had not provided themselves with food for the journey." (Ex. 12:39) (The leader replaces the matzah, and holds up the bitter herbs.)

Leader/Father: What is the meaning of the maror?

Participant/All: Maror means bitter herb, and symbolizes the bitterness of past suffering which our ancestors experienced in Egypt. As it is written, "The Egyptians forced the children of Israel into slavery, and made their lives unbearable with hard labor, work with clay and with brick, all kinds of work in the fields; they forced on them every kind of labor." (Ex. 1:13-14)

Commentator: This part of the service ends with the prayers of thanksgiving to God through chanting one of the Psalms of deliverance, and drinking the second cup of wine, the cup of deliverance.
(All together recite or sing Psalm 114.)

PSALM 114 Hymn for the Passover

Alleluia!

When Israel came out of Egypt, the House of Jacob from a foreign nation Judah became his sanctuary and Israel his domain.

The sea fled at the sight, the Jordan stopped flowing, the mountains skipped like rams, and like lambs, the hills.

Sea, what makes you run away? Jordan, why stop flowing?

Why skip like rams, you mountains, why like lambs, you hills?

Quake, earth, at the coming of your Master, at the coming of the God of Jacob, who turns rock into pool flint into fountain.

Leader/Father: With the second cup of wine, we recall the second promise of liberation.

All: "I will deliver you." (Ex. 6:6)

Leader/Father: It is written: "And on that day you shall explain to your children, 'This is because of what Yahweh did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" It is not only our ancestors that the Lord redeemed, but he redeemed us as well along with them, and all generations to come. (The participants raise their cups and say:)

All: Therefore, we are bound to thank, praise, honor, bless and adore him who brought us forth from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to feasting, from bondage to redemption, from darkness to great light. We praise you, O God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine! (All drink the second cup. The symbolic meal is now served.)

Commentator: The meal is customarily begun with hard-boiled eggs flavored with salt water. The egg is symbolic of new growth, new hope, new life. (Each person dips a slice of egg in salt water and eats it.)

Commentator: The meat is eaten according to the custom that: "The flesh (of the lamb) is to be eaten, roasted over fire; it must be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." (Exodus 12:8). (The server now gives each person a symbolic piece of lamb [or other meat] which is eaten.)

Commentator: We believe that at this point in the Lord's Supper Jesus instituted the Eucharist. We read in Luke's Gospel: "He took bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying, 'This is my body, which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me.'" (Lk. 22:19)

Leader/Father: As we now share the bread of the afikoman, let us realize that the fellowship which binds us together is the grace and peace we share as members of the Body of Christ. (All eat of the *afikoman*.)

Commentator: Luke's account continues: "He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the New Covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you'" (Lk. 22:20). Here we clearly see the connection between the cup of Jesus' New Covenant and our final cup of the Seder, the cup of redemption. (Wine is poured for each person.)

Leader: Let us together take up our cups of wine, and recall the final promise:

All: As it is written: "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm." Praised are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine! (All drink the final cup of wine.)

GESTURE OF PEACE

Leader/Father: We have now celebrated our unity in this symbolic meal, in sharing this bread and this wine. We recall the words of the Lord Jesus at this point in the Last Supper: "Peace I leave you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give...." Let us now offer one another an appropriate sign of the peace we have experienced here as the company of believers gathered to celebrate these mysteries of our faith. (All exchange a sign of peace.)

Leader/Father: Let us conclude our ritual by joining our hands and hearts in praying the words which Jesus offered to his Father for us on the night we recall here.

All: Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.... I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One.... Consecrate them in truth--your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.... May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. (Pause for silent prayer.)

FINAL BLESSING

Leader/Father: Let us bless each other.

All: May the Lord bless us and keep us! May the Lord let his face shine upon us and be gracious to us! May the Lord look upon us kindly, and grant us peace! Amen!

Closing Song: (see Introduction for suggestions).

The complete meal is now served in a spirit of festivity and celebration. In the Hebrew tradition it is actually incorporated into the preceding ritual meal.

As we enjoy this meal, let us remember that Jesus became the fulfillment of all the promises of redemption and deliverance we mark here tonight. Jesus has called us out of darkness and made us his chosen people of the New Covenant. That is why we gather here tonight. That is why we celebrate this meal. Jesus, the Lamb of God, has offered himself for the forgiveness of our sins. Happy are we who share in this supper.