

INTRODUCTION

The long history of our people is one of contrasts — freedom and slavery, joy and pain, power and helplessness. Passover reflects these contrasts. Tonight as we celebrate our freedom, we remember the slavery of our ancestors and realize that many people are not yet free.

Each generation changes — our ideas, our needs, our dreams, even our celebrations. So has Passover changed over many centuries into our present holiday. Our nomadic ancestors gathered for a spring celebration when the sheep gave birth to their lambs. Theirs was a celebration of the continuity of life. Later, when our ancestors became farmers, they celebrated the arrival of spring in their own fashion. Eventually these ancient spring festivals merged with the story of the Exodus from Egypt and became a new celebration of life and freedom.

As each generation gathered around the table to retell the old stories, the symbols took on new meanings. New stories of slavery and liberation, oppression and triumph were added, taking their place next to the old. Tonight we add our own special chapter as we recall our people's past and we dream of the future.

For Jews, our enslavement by the Egyptians is now remote, a symbol of communal remembrance. As we sit here in the comfort of our modern world, we think of the millions who still suffer the brutality of the existence that we escaped thousands of years ago.