With a scourge of ten plagues, the drama of a parting sea and the eventual grand gift of the Ten Commandments, Pesach seems to be the most partisan celebration on the Jewish calendar. A true national coming-of-age, the Exodus and its yearly re-enactment at the Seder table mark the Children of Israel’s passage – both physically and spiritually – from enslavement and degradation to dominion and honour.

Pesach’s theme of freedom – for both the Children of Israel and the rest of humanity – actually makes it Judaism’s most universal festival, appealing not only to members of our own community but to the aspirations of people of all religions, backgrounds, genders and inclinations.

“Ha lachma ania deo aclo avhetana b’ areh d’Mitzraim,” we chant in an Aramaic text that unites us in both its obscurity and familiarity. “This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt,” we say, pointing to the three ceremonial matzot in the center of the Seder table. “All who are hungry – let them come and eat. All who are needy – let them come and celebrate the Passover with us. Now we are here, next year may we be in the Land of Israel. Now we are slaves, next year may we be free men.”

It is with this text that we welcome our guests around the Seder table to tell the story of the Exodus, to feast with them like royalty while we recount the tale of slaves. To speak of Seder table to tell the story of the Exodus, to feast with them like royalty while we recount the tale of slaves. To speak of

As we sit down with our loved ones for the first Seder on Monday evening, April 14, it is essential that we remember that large portions of the world’s population still do not live in freedom, while thousands more – including segments of the Jewish community – are terrified at the prospect of any religious expression.

“It would be comforting to think that slavery is a relic of history, but it remains a scar on humanity on every continent,” said Walk Free CEO Nick Grono, noting that over 29 million people around the world are not living in freedom.

Walk Free’s most recent report, titled the Global Slavery Index, ranked 162 countries on three factors: the estimated prevalence of modern slavery, child marriages and human trafficking. Another report from Freedom House stated that individual freedom has declined for the eighth straight year based on political rights and civil liberties. Only 88 countries of 195 (45%) surveyed were listed as free.

Though not physically imprisoned, in many parts of the world our Jewish brothers and sisters still combat pervasive antisemitism.

In late March, a pair of unidentified men assaulted Rabbi Hillel Cohen who runs the Ukrainian branch of the Hatzalah emergency services organization, while he walked on the street, said his wife, Rachel Cohen. “They struck him in the leg, shouting anti-Semitic slurs, while he walked on the street, his wife Rachel Cohen.” Mrs. Cohen told the Jewish Telegraph Agency, referring to the derogatory word.

As we break our matzot and pour our glasses of wine, we must vow to do everything in our power to liberate our fellow human beings who are behind bars – physically or spiritually.

In one of the most famous and moving portions of the Seder, the Haggadah speaks of four archetypical children and their varying dispositions when it comes to the issues of freedom and human suffering – the wise child, the wicked, and the simple-minded and the non-inquisitive.

The greatest lesson, like so many times in history, comes from the wicked child, who doesn’t actually perpetrate the evil, but sits back and does nothing as evil occurs. Which child will each of us be this year?

Earlier this month, a synagogue in the Crimean city of Simferopol was vandalized, its facade sprayed with swastikas and the words “Death to Jews.” There are about 15,000 Jews in Crimea, a total of 200,000 in the Ukraine. They prepare their Seder in a world of political uncertainty and fear of war. The prospect of conducting a peaceful Seder is no longer a given for the Jews of Hungary and of France, who are increasingly troubled by a rise in antisemitism.

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