

Facts about modern slavery

- * The conservative estimate of *Free the Slaves* is that there are 27 million people being held in bondage today, **more than at any other time in human history**. Slavery is fueled by the population explosion, displacement to urban centers, poverty and desperation, and government corruption or inaction.
- * The *US State Department* estimates that 14,500 to 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked into the U.S. annually; some advocacy groups put the number at several times that. Victims – both foreign nationals and U.S. citizens – have been indentified in cities, suburbs, and rural areas in all 50 states as well as in Washington, DC. Trafficked individuals work in homes, factories, restaurants, agriculture, and more, many of them right under our very noses. (*Free the Slaves* and UC Berkeley documented cases in more than 90 U.S. cities.)
- * Human trafficking, according to the *Polaris Project*, is the second largest and fastest growing criminal industry in the world. Worldwide, most slaves are forced to work in agriculture, mining, and prostitution. **Certain products that are very much a part of our American lives, such as coffee, chocolate, cars, may be traceable to slave labor.** U.S.-based international corporations, or American companies doing extensive business with overseas manufacturers and exporters, bear responsibility for the supply chain.
- * According to *ECPAT USA*, over 2 million children, as young as 6 years old, are exploited in the child sex trade around the world today. The problem exists everywhere, including in the U.S. The *National Runaway Switchboard* estimates that thousands of American youth of all races were bought and sold last year.
- * Education, wealth, age, or social standing does not guarantee invulnerability to becoming a human trafficking victim. Traffickers prey on people who are yearning for a better life, have little or no employment opportunities, have an unstable or harmful home life, or have survived sexual abuse – conditions present in all socioeconomic strata.
- * Estimates of *ECPAT USA* indicate that as many as 25% of child sex tourists around the world may be US citizens. Implicated in this life-destroying and demeaning practice are American companies bringing employees to certain countries for conferences and looking the other way, as well as travel agents, airlines, hotels, advertisers, and others who could be effective in ending this criminal dimension of tourism.
- * The richest 10 percent of the world's population's income is roughly 117 times higher than the poorest 10 percent, according to calculations performed by

economists at the Economic Policy Institute, using data from the International Monetary Fund. Families living in poverty can become targets of human traffickers who promise vulnerable men, women and children a better life through employment, educational opportunities or marriage.

Why modern slavery should matter to the Jewish community

The Egyptian enslavement of the Israelites and the redemption from that bondage is the founding story of the Jewish people. Our ancestors were migrant workers who became enslaved by cruel taskmasters who oppressed them with backbreaking labor and who threatened them by ordering the midwives to murder every newborn male infant. The products of our ancestors' slave labor became the glory of ancient Egypt.

Every Passover, we speak of how in every generation there are those who try to enslave and destroy us and how in every generation we are obligated to see ourselves as having left Egypt.

From this story, the Torah teaches us, from both lofty ideals and practical steps, to combat brutal slavery:

- To remember that we were slaves and strangers in Egypt (Deuteronomy 15:15; 24:18, 22)
- Not to take advantage of the stranger and to love him/her (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:19)
- Not to stand idly by the blood of your neighbor (Leviticus 19:16)
- To redeem slaves (Leviticus 25:46-55) ;
- To redeem captives (Pidyon Shevuim) (Rambam, Hilchoth Matanoth Onayim 8:10)
- Not to return escaped slaves to their masters (Deuteronomy 23:16-17)
- Not to traffic men or women for the purpose of prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:18-19)
- Not to charge interest to those in debt (Exodus 22: 24; Leviticus 25:35-28; Deuteronomy 23:20-21)
- Not to abuse day laborers and to pay such laborers a living wage (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)
- Full judicial protection for the most vulnerable (Deuteronomy 16:19-20;24:17)

Rosh Hashanah is called *Yom HaZikaron*, the Day that God Remembers. On this day, God remembers all of our deeds. God also remembers those people the rest of us

have forgotten. When we ask God to inscribe us in the Book of Life, we must remember those whose lives are misery, those who are living in deplorable conditions, and those who don't receive compensation for their work.

Before we sound the shofar, the sound of remembrance and freedom, we read from Psalms, "From the depths I cried out to God," and that God answers. Each day, around the world and here at home, there are cries going unanswered by fellow humans. We must work to bring freedom to those still in the depths. It will not be easy. To truly address trafficking, we cannot just free individual slaves but we must also address the root causes of poverty that make slavery and trafficking possible. Our eyes are now open: we must take action on what we see.

Some preliminary resources

Websites for more information:

The International Forum on Migration's fact sheet about trafficking and slavery:

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/page676.html>

<http://www.freetheslaves.net/Page.aspx?pid=183>

<http://www.ecpatusa.org/about.html>

<http://www.cocoainitiative.org/a.html>

<http://www.gourmet.com/magazine/2000s/2009/03/politics-of-the-plate-the-price-of-tomatoes>

"Special Issue on Trafficking" http://www.shma.com/oct_08/archive.phtml

"Close to Slavery" <http://www.splcenter.org/legal/guestreport/index.jsp>

A short curriculum on slavery:

http://www.hrea.org/index.php?doc_id=430

Indentured Servitude Abolition Act of 2007:

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/edlabor_dem/re1050608.html

Business for Social Responsibility, "International Labor Migration: A Responsible Role for Business"

http://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_LaborMigrationRoleforBusiness.pdf

International Labor Organization Report: "The Cost of Coercion"

http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang--en/WCMS_106219/index.htm

ILO: "Giving a Fair Deal the World's 86 Million Migrant Workers"

http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Feature_stories/lang--en/WCMS_069779/index.htm

ILO: 2006 Fact sheet on Labor Migration

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_067570.pdf

Books:

Kevin Bales, Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves, University of California Press, 2007.

Kevin Bales, Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy, University of California Press, 1999.

[Kevin Bales](#) and [Ron Soodalter](#), The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today, May 2009.

Suzanne Miers, Slavery in the 20th Century. The Evolution of a Global Problem, AltaMira Press, 2003.