



Slavery and Human Trafficking Today

A Special High Holy Day

Sermon and Teaching Resource

The Shofar calls to us to awaken to the realities of sin and injustice in our lives and in our community.

Join us in raising awareness of the pervasive presence of slavery in the global economy, and in our own backyards.

Rabbinical Assembly Social Justice Commission

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of day three, the earth was as flat as a board, with the waters covering it entirely. But when the word came forth from on high, mountains and hills arose from the sides of the earth, and the waters were scattered about, as valleys were formed and the waters flowed into the valleys. The waters immediately attempted to rise up again and cover the earth once more, at which God rebuked them, and secured them under the divine feet.and thus there are deep waters beneath the surface of the earth, on which the earth rides just as a boat rides on the waters of the sea.

*God then opened a channel to the Garden of Eden, from which all sorts of plant life began to sprout over the surface of the earth, including all kinds of fruit bearing trees. In this way, God set a table for the animal world even before they were created. And fountains also arise out of the deep in order to provide water for all creatures. Rabbi Joshua said that the depth of the earth is a distance of sixty years' walk. And there is one fountain that sits immediately over **גיהנום**, which flows from there, producing [warm] waters that provide pleasure for human beings.*

- Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 5¹

One might read this text as rehabilitating **גיהנום**, but the rabbis were reminding us to be aware of the fact that the pleasures of many of our paradises are often situated right above somebody else's hell, and are made possible by those hells. This is one of the important truths of our time: slave labor is present in the supply chains of many items we take for granted, and the demand for cheap food and endless inexpensive goods enables wages to be pushed ever lower and working conditions made even more intolerable.

When we sit down to our High Holy Day meals this year, there are guests who are all but invisible making our meals possible. They are the slaves who provide the labor for our celebration. There is a concept called “the slavery footprint.” This information, thanks to the work of [Made in a Free World](#), teaches us that virtually every product, and all the food we expect and enjoy, comes to our table thanks to slave labor.

This is an almost unbearable reality, to which we are blind. Our clothes, our furniture, and our food comes to us “thanks” to the slave labor of underpaid and imprisoned individuals around the world, who make our “affordable” goods available for us.

On Rosh Hashanah, the Shofar calls to us to awaken to the realities of sin and injustice in our personal lives and in our community. This year, join fellow members of the RA in raising awareness of the pervasive presence of slavery in the global economy, and in our own backyards. It is asking us to become more aware of how the people who pick our fresh food and process our meat are often abused and live in slave like conditions. The RA is asking us to become more aware of how the clothes we wear, the rugs we walk on, and the cellphones we talk on are often produced under slave

¹ [The Dignity of Work and the Indignity of Slavery: Texts with Questions](#), Rabbi Gordon Tucker's text sheet from his session at the 2008 Conference on Judaism and Human Rights.

like conditions. This year, the RA is asking all of us to become more aware of how young women are trafficked and often abused for sexual affairs.

The members of the RA Social Justice Commission believe strongly that nothing will change until more of us become aware of how we all benefit from slave labor and abusive working conditions. The RA Social Justice Commission believes that the rabbinate has a key role to play in educating the Jewish community about modern slavery and increasing its awareness. The Commission believes that the High Holidays are an appropriate time to educate our community on these issues.

The RA Social Justice Commission has prepared these materials which will give you more information about modern slavery. Included are: A list of facts and talking points on modern slavery, sermon sparks, several sermons, and a bibliography on the subject. Finally, we've included recommendations for communal action that have been endorsed by President's Obama's Advisory Council on Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, [Building Partnerships to Eradicate Modern Day Slavery](#).

The RA Social Justice Commission welcomes your feedback on the materials we have gathered and on the importance of slavery as a social justice issue.

SLAVERY TODAY

By Rachel Kahn-Troster (adapted from [T'ruah](#))

- **What is the official definition of modern slavery?**

In the United States, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines victims of trafficking as:

1. a) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age; or
 2. b) The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.
- It is estimated that between 21 and 27 million people are held in bondage today.
 - **What does modern slavery look like?** According to the International Labor Organization, 18.7 million (90 %) are exploited in the private economy, by individuals or enterprises, including 4.5 million (22 %) who are victims of forced sexual exploitation and 14.2 million (68%) who are victims of forced labor exploitation in economic activities, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work or manufacturing. An additional 2.2 million (10%) are in state-imposed forms of forced labor, for example in prisons, or in work imposed by the state military or by rebel armed forces (such as child soldiers).
 - **Slavery is the extreme end of a continuum of abusive and exploitative labor practices.** Slavery is fueled by systems of poverty, the population explosion, displacement to urban centers and other forms of migration, desperation, and government corruption and inaction.
 - 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. Children who run away from home are especially vulnerable.
 - Slavery is a crime of exploitation, not movement. People can be enslaved in their own village, city, or country.
 - Slavery happens everywhere in the world. American citizens can also be victims of human trafficking, even without leaving the country.
 - **Persons who are trafficked are not necessarily slaves who are chained up or locked behind a door. Fraud and coercion are major components of modern slavery.** Human trafficking is often characterized by limited mobility and threats of violence to prevent escape. Employers may steal passports, use violence or threats of violence against the trafficked persons and/or their families should they escape. Debt to a trafficker (real or inflated), combined with threats of violence, keeps victims from fleeing.

- Products that we buy every day such as coffee, produce, clothes, chocolate, cars, may be traceable to slave labor. **Companies must take responsibility for their supply chains.**
- Victims – both foreign nationals and U.S. citizens – have been identified in cities, suburbs, and rural areas in all 50 states as well as in Washington, DC. Trafficked individuals work in places such as private homes, factories, restaurants, agriculture, nursing homes, state fairs, construction sites, forced prostitution, and nail salons. Temporary workers here legally as well as undocumented migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation.

SERMON SPARKS

1. As we sit down to our High Holy Day meals this year, there are guests who are all but invisible making our meals possible. They are the slaves who provide the labor for our celebration. There is a concept called "my slavery footprint" ([more info about slavery footprint](#)) This information, thanks to the work of [Made in a Free World](#), teaches us that virtually every product, and all the food we expect and enjoy, comes to our table thanks to slave labor. This is an almost unbearable reality, to which we are blind. Our clothes, our furniture, and our food comes to us "thanks" to the slave labor of underpaid and imprisoned individuals around the world, who make our "affordable" goods available for us. Yet our tradition teaches us [for instance, in the Yom Kippur *haftarah*] that we must awaken from our "blindness" to this terrible reality. And this awakening must be a call to action. The [call of the shofar/*haftarah* of Isaiah] calls us to act. The Torah's mandate is clear. We are not free until all those from whose heavy burden of labor are free – to receive their fair due for the work they perform. We bear the heavy moral burden to work for their freedom, whether they are imprisoned by circumstance, oppression, forced prostitution, or greedy profiteers. We must learn about their plight, lobby our local and national elected officials, and work for their liberation.
2. Biblical prohibitions on abusing the stranger and commands to love the stranger:
 1. Exodus 22:20; 23:9;
 2. Leviticus 19:33-34;
 3. Deuteronomy 10:18-19;
 4. Deuteronomy 24:14-15.
3. Young women who are trafficked for sexual purposes are strangers in our society. They have often been abused in their family of origin and have become runaways. Then they become abused by their handlers or pimps. Then they can become abused by our legal system which often declares them to be criminals. They are truly alone and vulnerable. Other strangers in our society are the migrant workers who pick our fruits and vegetables and the workers in food processing plants. They too are vulnerable to physical and sexual abused to becoming enslaved.
4. The Story of Hagar as a paradigm of how slaves are easily abused by their masters: Genesis 16 and 21. The story of Hagar if we choose to see it gives insight into how the slave or servant is at the mercy of his or her master or mistress. Sarah abused Hagar until she threw her out of the house with Yishmael. Hagar and Yishmael could have easily perished if it wasn't for divine intervention. The slaves in our society need the intervention of an angel. We can become angels by reaching out to the slaves who we often overlook.
5. The *haftarah* for Yom Kippur (Isaiah 57 and 58) challenges us to "unlock the fetters of evildoing, to untie the cords of lawlessness, and to let the oppressed go free..." Yom Kippur

then is not just about asking for forgiveness by fasting, praying, and studying, but forgiveness also is granted if we reach out to those whose plight we have ignored or whom we have been unaware of. Surely no group of people in the world are more low-of-spirit or downtrodden – than those who have been abused for others' profit – than those trafficked as slaves today – when the world hardly even recognizes their oppression as existing. The spiritual challenge for us is to imitate the words of the prophet – להחיות – to give them new life.

6. In the **על חטא: באמוץ הלב. בגלוי עריות. בויעידת זנות. ביצר הרע. ביודעים ובלא יודעים** Some of us may have indulged in taking advantage of others for sexual gratification. Others – many of us – may have hardened our hearts, or not opened our hearts, to see the reality of oppression by those who seek to become rich at the expense of other people's freedom – stealing human beings, deceiving them, abusing them, enslaving them in a variety of ways. Yet those of us who look away – or do not actively look, so that we know what is done – are equally guilty of this "hardening our hearts."
7. In *masekhet* Shabbat 54b-55a, the Talmud highlights the teaching of Rav and R. Hanina, R. Yohanan and R. Habiba:

All who can protest against [something wrong that] one of their family [is doing] and does not protest, is held accountable for their family. [All who can protest against something wrong that] a citizen of their city [is doing and does not protest], is held accountable for all citizens of the city. [All who can protest against something wrong that is being done] in the whole world, is accountable together with all citizens of the world. R. Papa observed, And the household members of the Head of the Diaspora are accountable for the whole world. As R. Hanina said it is written "The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof" (Isaiah 3). How did the elders sin? Because the elders do not protest against the princes.

This teaching reminds us that God will hold us accountable for the wrongs of others. We are responsible for others. We cannot say that slavery and trafficking are someone else's responsibility.

8. In the Mishnah Torah, Hilkhot Geneiva 9:1, the Rambam teaches,

Whoever steals a human soul transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said (Ex. 20:13), "Do not steal." This verse which is said in the 'Ten Words' is a warning to the one [who would] steal living souls.

Often the young women who are trafficked are stolen souls. Their bodies are regularly violated and their souls become defiled. Often they are kidnapped and become enslaved against their wills.

RABBINIC SERMONS & ESSAYS

- [Uniting Against Sex Trafficking](#)
Robyn Fryer Bodzin | The Huffington Post
- [The Call of the Shofar](#)
Charles M. Feinberg
- [Shabbos for You and for the Stranger: Sermon Notes](#)
Debra Orenstein
- [The Faith Community's Role in Ending Modern-Day Slavery](#)
Julie Schonfeld | The Huffington Post

WHITE HOUSE REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building Partnerships to Eradicate Modern-Day Slavery:

Report of Recommendations to the President from the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, April 2013

There are more people living in slavery today—an estimated 21 million across the globe—than there have ever been before. Every thirty seconds another person is abducted into a criminal industry worth \$32 billion annually, making it one of the world's largest. As matters currently stand, modern-day slave trafficking is lucrative and relatively low-risk. This must not be allowed to remain the case. As members of the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships we call upon our country's leadership in Washington, as well as citizens of the United States and the world, to ceaselessly fight this crime against humanity.

Modern-day slavery can take many forms. In the broadest sense, it is the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Slavery can manifest itself in ways such as labor trafficking, sex trafficking, bonded labor or debt bondage, involuntary domestic servitude, forced child labor, child sex trafficking, and the use of child soldiers. Victims of human trafficking are disproportionately poor, homeless, and members of communities of color. They are exploited as a result of war, economic inequity, greed, the exercise of malicious power over others, and the desire for immoral pleasure. Those who escape these horrific circumstances must not be judged or labeled according to crimes that they might have been forced to commit. They are survivors, they are humans, and they must be accepted and engaged as part of the solution.

Perpetrators of human trafficking are equally reliant on their ability to abuse the disadvantaged and on the inaction of individuals in power. Concentrated effort by government and nonprofit institutions, as well as awareness and activism by a concerned citizenry, can drastically curb these criminals' ability to exploit other human beings. The Obama administration has already issued an Executive Order calling for strengthened protections and a five-year strategic action plan to combat modern slavery. He has also assembled an Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking and requested the assistance of the Faith Council. After extensive research, the Council has proposed the following ten recommendations to the President in order to help end trafficking practices in the United States and across the globe:

1. Elevate the fight against modern-day slavery at home and abroad through a study identifying the necessary resources to combat trafficking and the establishment of a special fund devoted to its eradication.
2. Lead the effort to eliminate slave labor in the purchase and consumption of goods and services by creating an authoritative standard by which companies can measure their progress in eliminating trafficking from their supply chains and in their production. This would be based on successful US government precedent, following such models as Energy Star and USDA Organic.

3. Promote anti-trafficking work at the agency level by expanding the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to a bureau on par with regional bureaus of the State Department and creating an Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons at the Department of Health and Human Services.
4. Convene a national summit at the White House of faith, community, business, and philanthropic leaders to raise awareness and inspire action to combat modern slavery.
5. Develop and announce a National Call to Action for civil society that mobilizes purchasing power, community and NGO resources, and training facilities to help identify and curb human trafficking.
6. Produce a tool kit on how religious and community-based organizations can learn more about trafficking and take steps to join the fight by working to spot signs of trafficking, identify victims, and increase public knowledge.
7. Work with the Ad Council to create a forceful public awareness campaign with a goal of spurring funding and action.
8. Designate the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline as the primary national human trafficking hotline promoted to the public.
9. Call upon US embassies and USAID missions to work with civil society leaders in developing comprehensive strategies to fight trafficking.
10. Create a pilot partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service to place national service members from organizations such as AmeriCorps VISTA in mayors' and governors' offices to help map and coordinate local responses to human trafficking.

The scale and cruelty of this crime is unimaginable. Human trafficking violates the core tenets of every major religion and the basic precepts of civilized society. Its continued presence in our country risks our economy, security, and environment, in addition to compromising the well-being of future generations and our moral standing. We have responsibility as both humans and Americans beholden to the ideals of life, liberty, pursuit of happiness to oppose modern-day slavery in any and all forms that it may take. We support President Obama's efforts to do so and echo the sentiment of his statement: "Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time, and the United States will continue to lead it...For we know that every life saved—in the words of that great Proclamation—is 'an act of justice'; worthy of 'the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.'"

[View the Complete Report](#)

Julie Schonfeld served on the 2012-2013 President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. This interfaith body spent nearly nine months studying the issue of human trafficking, also known as modern-day slavery, and issued a report with recommendations to both the private and public sectors on how to end this human rights atrocity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & LINKS

Compiled by Rachel Kahn-Troster

There are a lot of websites and other resources devoted to human trafficking. This list is not meant to be comprehensive but to provide a snapshot of available information.

Victims' Stories and Media

As part of their annual [Trafficking in Persons Report](#), the State Department collects representative stories of victims of human trafficking in the United States and around the world. They tell the stories of men and women, children and adults, trafficked in all manner of industries. Clear themes emerge: the prevalence of violence, the roles of fraud and deception. These stories can put a personal face on what seems like an insurmountable problem. The report is also a useful resource for accurate statistics on human trafficking, descriptions of the problem in different countries, and stories of the heroes working at home and abroad to combat trafficking.

Stories from the Trafficking Reports: [2013](#) | [2012](#) | [2011](#) | [2010](#) | [2009](#)

The recent *Frontline* documentary "[Rape in the Fields](#)" documented sexual violence towards female migrant workers, one of the root causes of human trafficking.

Additional Stories:

- [Lakewood House Connected to Human Trafficking](#) (AppOnline)
- [U.S. Accuses 3 Countries of Abetting Human Trafficking](#) (NY Times, 2013)
- [Slaves Put Squid on Table from South Pacific](#) | [Related video](#) (Bloomberg News, 2012)
- [The Fishing Industry's Cruellest Catch](#) (Businessweek, 2012)
- [Indonesia's Palm Oil Industry Rife with Abuses](#) (Businessweek, 2013)
- [Saudi Princess Charged with Human Trafficking in California](#) (The Globe & Mail, 2013)
- [Housekeeper in NJ Accuses Peruvian Diplomat of Human Trafficking](#) (NY Times, 2013)
- [Human Trafficking: Not Someone Else's Problem](#) (CBS, 2010)
- [The Price of Tomatoes](#) (Gourmet, 2009; now a book, entitled "[Tomatoland](#)")
- [Nobodies](#) (The New Yorker, 2003; now a book, entitled "[Nobodies](#)")

Books:

- [The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today](#)
- [Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy](#)
- [Girls Like Us: Fighting for a World Where Girls are Not for Sale](#)

Jewish Organizations

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights has been leading the Jewish community's response to trafficking, including partnering with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to end slavery in the Florida tomato industry. [More information](#) (including extensive Jewish resources)

In April, 2013, UJA-Federation of New York held a major conference on sex trafficking called "We Were Slaves, Too." [Resources from the conference](#)

Many chapters of [National Council of Jewish Women](#) have taken on human trafficking as a priority issue, including in California, New Jersey, and Texas.

[Fair Trade Judaica](#) raises awareness in the Jewish community about slavery in the chocolate industry in the Ivory Coast and advocates for kosher manufacturers to switch to Fair Trade chocolate.

The San Francisco JCRC runs a [Jewish Coalition on Human Trafficking](#).

The Metrowest New Jersey JCRC has organized the [New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking](#).

The [Jewish Labor Committee Western Region](#) supports several projects on human trafficking.

[American Jewish World Service](#) addresses sex trafficking through its partnership with grassroots sex worker organizations in the global south. [Read a recent article](#) by AJWS President Ruth Messinger about sex trafficking.

[ATZUM Justice Works – Combatting and Resolving Social Justice Crises in Israel](#) aims to engage the public and government agencies in Israel to confront and eradicate modern slavery in Israel, and lobbies for reform in the areas of prevention, border closure, protection of escaped women, and the prosecution of traffickers.

[The Israel Hotline for Migrant Workers](#) is an NGO dedicated to promoting the rights of undocumented migrant workers and refugees and eliminating trafficking in persons in Israel.

Secular Organizations (Adapted from [T’ruah](#))

The [State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons](#) is a good resource and can serve as a good starting point.

The [Coalition of Immokalee Workers](#) (CIW) is a groundbreaking, worker-led campaign to end slavery in the Florida tomato fields.

The [National Human Trafficking Resource Center](#) is available to answer questions about fighting human trafficking in your home community and ways to reach out to survivors. You can also report cases of trafficking.

The [International Labor Organization](#) maintains up-to-date statistics on forced labor worldwide, including current research and frequently asked questions.

The [Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking](#) (ATEST) and [Freedom Network USA](#) are the two major American anti-trafficking coalitions.

The [Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women](#) (GAATW) promotes the rights of women migrant workers and trafficked persons and believes that ensuring safe migration and fair work places should be at the core of all anti-trafficking efforts. Their website contains important research about trafficking and sporting events.