

RABBIS IN ACTION

A few years ago, as the Washington State Legislature was considering a bill on human trafficking, I sought out the sponsoring Senator and offered my testimony, as a member of the clergy, in support of the bill during the public hearing. While others spoke of the facts of human trafficking, and a victim shared her story, I offered a spiritual and ethical message based in Jewish teachings. Sitting in that hearing room to share this simple yet fundamental message felt like an important opportunity we have as rabbis to effect change, and to share a message our lawmakers need to hear more often: that lawmaking is as much a moral act as it is a legal act.

- Rabbi Seth Goldstein,
Temple Beth Hatfiloh,
Olympia, WA

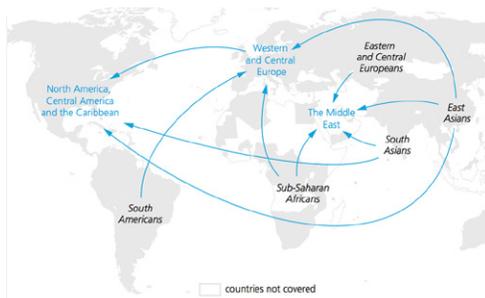
Organizations that have lobbying arms, such as the local Jewish Federation, can often help connect community leaders with opportunities to give testimony.

Wanting to go home, wanting to stay

"I just got my green card! Now I can go to the Philippines. And finally hold my son. I want to be there before his birthday...I waited for this. I never complained. I've suffered so much. But I never did anything to the people who hurt me...My boyfriend wanted to go out and celebrate. I said, 'Let me be for a while.' I needed to think about it."

-Maria, trafficked from the Philippines for domestic labor; *Life Interrupted*, p. 146.

Good data are hard to come by, but a conservative estimate by the International Labor Organization puts the total number of enslaved people worldwide at 21 million.



The arrows show the flows that represent 5% and above of the total victims detected in destination subregions.

From UN Office on Drugs and Crime, based on 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report. According to UN Dispatch, "most trafficking occurs within a region" and is therefore not recorded on this map.
www.undispatch.com/human-trafficking-map

- What populations would you think are especially vulnerable to enslavement?
- Does anything surprise you about this map?

“VaNitZ’ak el Adonai Elohei Avoteinu” —We cried out to the God of our Ancestors

**“Tzeh Ul’mad” -
Go Out and Learn**

“And he dwelt there”—This teaches that Jacob our Father did not go down to Egypt to live there permanently but rather to dwell temporary. As the Torah recounts, “They said to Pharaoh, ‘We have come to dwell in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants’ sheep, for the famine is very heavy in Canaan. And now, please let your servants settle in the land of Goshen.’” (Gen. 47:4)

- Haggadah

At the bottom level [of poverty] are more than one billion people who live on \$1 a day or less... This is life without options... These are families whose children are regularly harvested into slavery... If we compare the level of poverty and the amount of slavery for 193 of the world’s countries, the pattern is obvious. The poorest countries have the highest levels of slavery.

- Kevin Bales, *Ending Slavery* (2007), p. 15-17

Some formerly trafficked persons had never planned to live in the United States... [but for others] migration for work was a mobility strategy, a plan to attain long-term economic goals... In short, this is an ambitious and resourceful group, willing to avail themselves of whatever resources are within their reach.

- Denise Brennan, *Life Interrupted* (2014), p. 15

- Bales and Brennan, both respected researchers, present different views of modern slavery, each of which is supported in the anti-trafficking community. How do you respond to their portrayals?
- Which model better describes the biblical Jacob and his sons?

For most of us, human trafficking is an issue that happens far away, but each year thousands of children are victims of trafficking here in our own country.

We ask, “Why did we not know about this modern day slavery?”

There are few advocates for trafficking victims. Human slaves are, by definition, the most powerless people on Earth. Therefore, each of us has a responsibility to speak out and take action. We must be that voice that screams out against this outrage of human trafficking and demands change. We must try to improve justice for trafficking victims and help curb the demand to eliminate human trafficking forever. By our actions, we can rescue thousands of men, women, and children, giving them back their stolen lives.

For once we know that trafficking exists, we can never be the same. Our failure to speak out makes us complicit in this crime. So on this festival of Passover, when we tell the story of our own journey from slavery to freedom, we must speak out and create a new reality for those who live in slavery today and give them lives of dignity and freedom, just as we celebrate tonight.

- Susan Stern, Chair,
President’s Advisory Council
on Faith Based and
Neighborhood Partnerships