

It has been 10 years since I have been free, flying like a bird! In the mid-1970s, at the age of 15, I was sold for \$200 to a man who I supposed to be working for...I was kept in his house for more than five years against my will... I spent 22.5 years in prison for this crime I did not commit. After all those years, I thought I was going home with my family. But no! I did not go home. The INS picked me up and held me for 5 months and 7 days. This time I was told I was going to be deported... Human trafficking is like a monster that has a lot of heads. If you catch one trafficker, get rid of one head, there are still many others who continue damaging and causing pain to our society...Let's advocate and stop the monster from hurting the new generation and others.

- Maria Suarez, who was trafficked within Los Angeles County

*More of her story can be found at [www.jewishjournal.com/womanwrites/item/ten\\_years\\_of\\_freedom\\_from\\_human\\_trafficking\\_victim\\_to\\_survivor\\_and\\_advocate](http://www.jewishjournal.com/womanwrites/item/ten_years_of_freedom_from_human_trafficking_victim_to_survivor_and_advocate)*

<sup>1</sup> People often escape with just the clothes on their back.

<sup>2</sup> Not only during forced labor but during the lengthy application for a T visa. This also affects American citizens who are enslaved within the US.

<sup>3</sup> Including nightmares and fear of going to public places lest the person encounter his/her trafficker or someone who knows the trafficker.

<sup>4</sup> Imagine being truly on your own, without even a casual acquaintance to turn to.

<sup>5</sup> An American citizen who is enslaved at least has this going for her—s/he's not in a foreign country where she doesn't understand language or culture. Unless s/he has cognitive challenges, as has been the case in a number of instances of slavery.

<sup>6</sup> Tragically, this often leads to avoiding the local coethnic community that could be a source of support and to concealing the truth of what happened from their families.

<sup>7</sup> Some benefits become available if the person is in the process of applying for a T visa—but that can be frightening because it requires interacting with police and government bureaucracy, which the person may have learned to mistrust (either from her/his home country or from the trafficker's threats). Even if a T visa is secured, benefits run out long before the need does.

<sup>8</sup> This makes it difficult to get a job—or makes commuting take so long that night classes become impossible, trapping the person in a dead-end existence.

<sup>9</sup> Police lack training in understanding or identifying modern slavery. They may arrest victims as criminals or, chillingly, return them to the home of their traffickers.

<sup>10</sup> Including homeless shelters. Even with the best of intentions, a trained but not specialized professional can easily miss some of the above.

## Ten Plagues of Forced Labor

It's easy to think of the plagues suffered by a person while s/he is enslaved—physical and sexual abuse, stolen wages, fear and humiliation. And it's easy to imagine the courage it takes to escape, as well as the kindness of strangers that sometimes makes this possible. But even after getting free, troubles mount that may not be immediately apparent. For people who come to the United States from abroad and find themselves enslaved, these plagues continue to follow them long after their escape.

Spill a drop of wine/grape juice for each of the following:

1. No belongings<sup>1</sup>
2. Enforced separation from family<sup>2</sup>
3. Trauma<sup>3</sup>
4. No local support network<sup>4</sup>
5. Limited English<sup>5</sup>
6. Shame<sup>6</sup>
7. No government benefits<sup>7</sup>
8. No transportation or childcare<sup>8</sup>
9. Lack of training for police<sup>9</sup>
10. Lack of training for service providers<sup>10</sup>

The rabbis of the Haggadah use midrashic math to multiply the ten plagues into 50, 200, even 250. How might these ten plagues of trafficking grow into even more challenges?

As a rabbinical student in T'ruah's summer fellowship, I interned with Safe Horizon's Anti-Trafficking Program. In learning from my colleagues and getting to know some of Safe Horizon's clients, I came to appreciate the tremendous power of shame. The question is often asked of survivors of trafficking, "Why didn't you just leave?" One answer: "I was told I owe money, and I can't bear not paying it back." Another: "How could I return to my family without the salary I promised I'd share with them?" Or another: "My 'employer' had so much psychological control over me, I simply couldn't imagine getting out."

Shame keeps men and women in involuntary servitude even when physically they might be able to leave. It silences and stymies them, denying them the dignity and freedom deserved by everyone created in the image of God.

- Rabbi Daniel Kirzane, Temple Beth Chaverim Shir Shalom, Mahwah, NJ