

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 was 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

¹² People often escape with just the clothes on their back.

¹³ Not only during forced labor but during the lengthy application for a T visa. This also affects American citizens who are trafficked within the U.S.

¹⁴ Including nightmares and fear of going to public places lest the person encounter their trafficker or someone who knows the trafficker.

¹⁵ Imagine being truly on your own, without even a casual acquaintance to turn to.

¹⁶ An American citizen who is trafficked at least has this going for them — they are not in a foreign country where they don't understand language or culture — unless they have cognitive challenges, as has been the case in a number of instances of slavery.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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 their home country or from the trafficker's threats). Even if a T visa is secured, benefits run out long before the need does.

¹⁹ This makes it difficult to get a job — or makes commuting take so long that night classes become impossible, leaving the person with very limited opportunities.

²⁰ Police lack training in understanding or identifying human trafficking. They may arrest victims as criminals or, chillingly, return them to the home of their traffickers.

²¹ 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 they are 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 trafficked, these plagues continue to follow them long after their escape.

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

1. No belongings¹²
2. Enforced separation from family¹³
3. Trauma¹⁴
4. No local support network¹⁵
5. Limited English¹⁶
6. Shame¹⁷
7. No government benefits¹⁸
8. No transportation or childcare¹⁹
9. Lack of training for police²⁰
10. Lack of training for service providers²¹

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,
Oak Park Temple
B'nai Abraham Zion,
Oak Park, Ill.

Shortly after the Israelites leave Egypt, God commands a census, which counts 603,550 men fit for military service. (I can only hope that the women, children, and elderly were counted too and simply not reported in the text.)

A census symbolizes more than a statistical or military endeavor; enumerating our population is a prerequisite for living together and governing a community that provides for all. What does a census have to do with slavery? Slaves suffer in part when societies choose to leave them undocumented, uncounted, unidentified, and forgotten.

My work as a population health physician has taught me this: Governments can shed their responsibility for delivering and protecting the freedoms of undocumented and uncounted people by excluding them from censuses and statistics. A nation can appear healthy if the ill are not seen; it can appear wealthy if the poor do not report their income; it can appear literate if the uneducated do not complete a survey; and it can appear free if the slaves are not counted. Counting is the seed of accountability. Truly inclusive statistics can be a tool of resistance.

- Dr. Aaron Orkin,
MD, MPH, MSc;
University of Toronto;
Bronfman Fellow '99

We can think of the plagues like a labor campaign, a series of escalating actions that ratchet up pressure until management accepts workers' demands. Once the agreement is reached and the Israelites are free, the Book of Deuteronomy becomes, in effect, the Torah's equivalent of the Fair Food Standards Council — a system of regulations, oversight, and transparency that ensures the continued fair working of the system.

As Dr. Orkin and Judge Safer Espinoza reflect, the big ideas of freedom must always be backed up by concrete, implementable, transparent details.

As a Jew with whom the themes of freedom and systemic change resonate deeply, I have the opportunity to honor some of our best traditions by serving as director of the Fair Food Standards Council (FFSC). The Council is charged with monitoring and enforcing the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' agreements, including a human rights-based Code of Conduct. FFSC does the unglamorous, extremely detailed, yet very beautiful work of ensuring that systemic change is implemented and made real in the fields for the men and women who harvest the food we eat. Exodus from Egypt is a powerful metaphor for the transformation we see on Fair Food Program farms that have put an end to modern-day slavery, sexual assault, physical abuse, wage theft, and dangers to workers' health and safety. It is a privilege to serve this groundbreaking partnership between workers, growers and buyers as it truly brings about a "new day."

- Judge Laura Safer Espinoza,
Director, Fair Food
Standards Council

Dayeinu

Dayeinu is a symmetrical song, in which we sing the one-word chorus 14 times. The first seven describe the Exodus, culminating with drowning the Egyptians in the sea. The second seven describe the building of a just and self-sustaining society, culminating with the building of the Temple. Only when the system is stable can we really say "dayeinu."

In the same way, the work of fighting forced labor does not end the moment a slave is freed. It continues for years into the future as we support their recovery from trauma. We benefit from the society that enables their abuse; therefore we must shoulder the responsibility to build social and economic systems that no longer rely on or allow exploitation.



The concentric circles of Ms. Gray's artwork conjure Miriam leading the women in dance and celebration at the Red Sea.

Most domestic workers — a profession particularly vulnerable to human trafficking — are women.

Rabba Melissa Scholten-Gutierrez writes for the Jewish Women's Archive, "On some level, the women knew... that the slavery was ending for good, and there would be a reason to celebrate again... They left in such haste that they didn't do many things (perhaps most famously, letting their bread bake to completion), but they remembered their timbrels."²²

Sing "Miriam's Song," by Debbie Friedman z"l, and take a moment to celebrate the women who are leaders in your family and community. Visit www.truah.org/haggadah-songs for a recording.

²² <https://jwa.org/blog/faith-is-packing-your-timbrel>

"Moon—Safe Harbor,"
by Margeaux Gray
11" x 11", Acrylic and
mixed media, © 2015.