

Following Daru's excited and hopeful response, Rav Nachman resumes his own (disconnected) allegorical reflections on what ought to be recited on this Passover night. Despite the immediate presence of a real-life slave right before him, Rav Nachman remains pitifully oblivious to the struggles, hopes, and overall reality of his own servant.

JTS Talmud Professor Rabbi David Hoffman teaches that this exchange between Rav Nachman and Daru is a story about us. It is about the fundamental dissonance between the story we are living and the story we are telling. Especially today, as we are no longer an oppressed, enslaved nation, we can use our resources and power to overturn structures of abuse right before us. On this Passover night, let us heed Daru's call and answer it—wherever he is in our lives.

- Raysh Weiss, PhD, JTS Rabbinical School class of 2016; T'ruah board member and summer fellowship alumna; BYFI '01

A 1903 fine of \$1000-\$5000, in 2013 dollars, would be worth roughly \$60,000-\$300,000. (Based on <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>)

1. It may be surprising to learn that slavery existed into the 20th century. Why do you think it was able to persist?



Florida farmworkers in 1960, from the Peabody Award-winning CBS documentary *Harvest of Shame*

**“We used to own our slaves. Now we just rent them.”**

– Florida grower quoted in the film

2. Do this picture and this quote surprise you? Why or why not? What do they teach us about the legacy of slavery in the United States?

## “In the beginning, our ancestors worshipped idols”

Use the following four images/texts as a starting point for a conversation about the Legacy of American Slavery.

ATLANTA, GA., MAY 27 1903

**NEGROES HELD IN SERVITUDE**

**Alleged That Peonage Is Being Practiced in Alabama.**

**United States Government Is Investigating the Charge—Chief Wilkie Gives Details of the Working of the Peonage System.**

Washington, May 26.—At the request of the department of justice, the United States secret service has undertaken the work of investigating the charge of peonage, or holding another in servitude to work out a debt, which has been made against persons living in the vicinity of Montgomery, Ala. The punishment provided by the statute for this crime is a fine of not less than \$1,000 nor more than \$5,000, or imprisonment of not less than one year nor more than five. One man.

Courtesy of PBS, *Slavery by another name*, <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name>

*Rav Nachman asked his slave Daru, “What should a slave say to his master who has freed him and given him silver and gold?” Daru replied to him: “The slave should thank him and praise him!” Rav Nachman said to Daru: “You have exempted us from reciting ‘Ma Nishtana!’” (Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 116a)*

In the exchange above, Rav Nachman is speaking allegorically of the Passover Haggadah. But Daru understands him literally. Based on what Rav Nachman just said, Daru anticipates his imminent liberation by his master, but Rav Nachman is merely musing on the minutia of the Passover Haggadah's myths and rituals.

*Continued on next page...*

**TODAY**

**Examples of Modern-Day Slavery**

U.S. vs. Bontemps, July 2010. Cabioch Bontemps and two others indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of conspiracy to commit forced labor, holding 50+ guestworkers from Haiti against their will in the beanfields of Alachua County, FL. They held the workers' passports and visas. The indictment states that Bontemps raped one of the workers and threatened her if she reported it. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers trained law enforcement and helped with the referral to the Department of Justice. DOJ dropped the charges without explanation, though likely due to legal technicalities, in January 2012.



Photo by Fritz Myer, June 2010, Courtesy of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. Note the title on the truck.

4. Thanks to a 2005 Congressional report, we know that slaves participated in the building of the Capitol. What does the juxtaposition in this image say to you about our country?

5. How do we benefit today from the legacy of slavery in this country?

*Unable to leave the house. Forbidden to answer the door. Cut off from her family. Worked fourteen to sixteen hours per day. Paid nothing. Threatened with deportation and harm to her family. Someone called in a tip. She escaped.*

*Another tipster called the national hotline. She reported a woman in the neighborhood who never left the house, except to take out the trash. The FBI investigated. The woman had been held in forced labor for four years.*

*Involuntary servitude among domestic workers and nannies is one of America's most hidden crimes. Like domestic violence, it occurs behind closed doors. Like trafficking into other sectors, the victimization can involve rape and sexual violence. Like other forms of trafficking, the abuse leaves deep scars. Unlike most trafficking, some of the perpetrators are diplomats, who bring in domestic workers on special visas.*

*Domestic workers are among the most exploited workers in the world. Over the years, trafficking victims have told me they never expected to be exploited here. "Not in America," many have said. "That does not happen in America." But it does. In America. And all around the world.*

- Martina Vandenberg, Founder and President, Human Trafficking Pro Bono Legal Center



Photo by the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking, 2004

This looks like an ordinary apartment building in Los Angeles, but in fact it's a sweatshop in which seventy-two Thai women were enslaved for eight years, from 1987-1995<sup>1</sup>. A group of traffickers lured the women in with promises of good wages, then forced them to work up to eighteen hours a day making clothing for well-known brands for leading department stores. The workers were not allowed to leave the compound.

3. What do you notice about this picture? Does anything surprise you? What does this picture tell you about trafficking in the United States today?

<sup>1</sup> For more information: <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/70-Immigrants-Found-In-Raid-on-Sweatshop-Thai-3026921.php> and <http://americanhistory.si.edu/sweatshops/elmonte/elmonte.htm>. One of the extraordinary and heartbreaking aspects of this case is the crimes the traffickers were charged with—all relating to facilitating illegal immigration, rather than modern slavery—and the fact that, at least initially, the survivors were threatened with deportation if they were found to be undocumented. Since the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000, both perpetrators and survivors would be treated differently.

**TIMELINE OF TYPES OF SLAVERY IN AMERICA**

**17TH-18TH CENTURY**

**Indentured Servitude**  
Poor, often white immigrants from Europe were bound to work for a set number of years. They were often mistreated or held for longer than their period of indenture.

**17TH CENTURY-1865**

**Chattel Slavery**  
The purchase and sale of Africans as slaves.

**1865-1944**

**Convict Leasing**  
Prisoners were leased out as workers to private (white) citizens. These prisoners were overwhelmingly black and had often been arrested on flimsy charges, such as vagrancy.

**MID 19TH-MID 20TH CENTURY**

**Sharecropping**  
Black tenant farmers worked a portion of the owner's land, in exchange for a share of the crop. They had to purchase supplies and seeds from the owner. Tenants, often illiterate and at the mercy of unscrupulous landowners, frequently ended up only breaking even—or even further in debt—at the end of a season.

Every Passover, I sit with my friends and family to tell the story of our people's liberation from slavery in Egypt. As we tell the story, we are asked to imagine that we ourselves were once slaves in Egypt and now we are free.

As an African-American, during Passover, I often think about my ancestors who were brought to this country as slaves. I imagine they found comfort in the biblical story of the Exodus; seeing themselves as the Israelite slaves and the slave owners as the Pharaoh. I imagine them praying to God for freedom and never giving up hope.

As a Jew and an African-American, I carry the memories of people who were once enslaved. I hold on to our collective memory of our escape from Egypt to freedom. And like my ancestors, I pray for the freedom of all who are enslaved, and I am hopeful that next year we will all be free.

- Sandra Lawson,  
Reconstructionist Rabbinical  
College Class of 2018,  
T'ruah summer fellowship alumna

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, senior rabbi at Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park, Pa., and visiting professor of American Jewish history at Princeton, [says]...The Passover narrative...didn't become an abolitionist-related story until after World War II and the Civil Rights era. "Originally, Passover was theological. It's about redemption and the power of God. It's not really about setting human beings free in a universal way. The text says that God frees the Hebrew slaves because God loves the Hebrews. God doesn't free all slaves for all of humanity or send Moses out to become the William Lloyd Garrison of the ancient free world."

- "Passover in the Confederacy," by  
Sue Eisenfeld, *The New York Times*, 4/17/14

Although few Jews, like other Americans, opposed slavery at the [Civil] war's outset, many came to feel that the suffering of the war needed to be about something important: the end of slavery and the creation of a different America...As historian Howard Rock sums up, "The war was a transformative moment for Jews' understanding of American democracy."

- "Jews Mostly Supported Slavery—  
Or Kept Silent—During Civil War," by  
Ken Yellis, *The Forward*, 7/5/13

4. Do you think the Passover story is a helpful lens through which to view America today? What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of this paradigm?

## Summing Up: How We Remember America

*"A new king arose  
over Egypt who  
knew not Joseph."  
(Ex. 1:8)*

וַיִּקַּם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ  
עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא-יָדָע  
אֶת-יֹסֵף:

*"God heard their  
cry, and God  
remembered God's  
covenant with  
Abraham, Isaac,  
and Jacob. God  
saw the Israelites  
and God knew."  
(Ex. 2:24-25)*

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים  
אֶת-נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר  
אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרִיתוֹ  
אֶת-אַבְרָהָם אֶת-  
יִצְחָק וְאֶת-יַעֲקֹב:  
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּדַע  
אֱלֹהִים:

1. What do these verses teach us about forgetting and remembering?

2. America prefers to whitewash its history of slavery. What do we most often remember about the history of slavery in America? What do we most often forget? Why do you think this is the case?

3. The sequence of verbs is: God hears, remembers, sees, and knows. We often need to have multiple kinds of contact with an issue before it sinks in for us. What is your experience—what does it take to move **you** from hearing about an issue to internalizing and acting on it?

Slavery was "normal," constitutional. Slavery built the USA. Slavery is regulated, that is to say allowed, in our Talmud. In 1861, when Reform Rabbi David Einhorn preached, "Is it anything else but a deed of Amalek, rebellion against God, to enslave human beings created in His image?" he was driven from Baltimore by a mob that included Jews. Orthodox Rabbi Sabato Morais went beyond the halakha of his day, in 1864, to thunder, "What is Union with human degradation? Who would again affix his seal to the bond that consigned millions to [that]? Not I, the enfranchised slave of Mitzrayim." Today it is disruptive to ask—and keep asking when ignored—"Who grew this food we're eating? Who sewed our clothes?" Even more disruptive to answer and then say that our tradition calls us to act. Do I have the guts to emulate our *gedolim* and disrupt what's normal?

- Rabbi Robin Podolsky,  
Senior Adult Educator,  
Temple Beth Israel of  
Highland Park and Eagle Rock,  
Los Angeles, CA



### “Rising Above Oppression,” by Margeaux Gray

5”x 6”, Carved clay and paint, © 2015

Margeaux writes, “My story of rising above slavery and the unjust violence I experienced inspired this piece. Additionally, my ancestors and those who paved a path for my freedom to be possible were also an influence in its creation. The carved painting is of a woman connected to her ancestors. She draws from their strength and wisdom. She is empowered by them and rises above the oppressive nature that has for so long silenced her. She breaks through a wave and steps into the light of freedom.”

As we sing “*Vehi she-amda*,” we remember that in every generation, people have been held as slaves, and God has been their support, if not their complete redemption.

וְהִיא שֶׁעָמְדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ  
שֶׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלְתֵּינוּ

אֶלָּא שֶׁבְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ  
לְכַלְתֵּינוּ

*Vehi she-amda, vehi she-amda la'avoteinu  
velanu (x2)*

*She-lo echad bil'vad amad aleinu lechaloteinu  
Elah she-bechol dor vador omdim aleinu  
lechaloteinu*

*Vehakadosh baruch hu matzaleinu miyadam.*

**This is the One who stood up for our  
ancestors and for us.**

**For not just once did an enemy arise to  
destroy us,**

**But in every generation, they arise to  
destroy us.**

**And the Holy Blessed One rescues us  
from their hands.**

In Hebrew, “The One” in the song is feminine. Who is this One? The classical rabbis would probably say the Torah. The Kabbalists invoked *Binah*, a feminine aspect of God. In the spirit of 70 faces of Torah, here is a slightly subversive suggestion: the one who stood up for our ancestors—literally, our fathers—is our mothers. We remember the oft-erased contribution women have played throughout history and celebrate the importance and power of women’s leadership in fighting slavery today.

### RABBIS IN ACTION

At Yavneh’s core is the belief that the Jewish values and ethics the students learn are only realized when put into action, so integrated throughout our curriculum are opportunities to practice these values in real life situations. Specifically, our middle school students engage in a three year Jewish social justice curriculum, in which they examine how they can contribute to the world, responding to the needs of their own community through direct service and making a difference globally through philanthropy and advocacy.

T’ruah’s Human Rights Shabbat has become an annual tradition at our school, in which our middle school students teach the elementary school students. In the last few years, we have closely examined the issue of human trafficking in America and the Jewish teachings that categorically make it an imperative for Jews to be involved. Our students have made tomato plates for their seder tables; engaged in inter-disciplinary learning researching the history of agriculture in America, calculating fair wages, and writing letters to Congress; and created presentations to raise awareness in the community.

- Rabbi Laurie Hahn Tapper,  
Director of Jewish Studies  
and School Rabbi,  
Yavneh Day School,  
Los Gatos, CA