

# Pesach and Modern Slavery

## Slavery Then and Now

Every Pesach, Jews throughout the world are commanded to tell the story of their enslavement in Egypt: *“And the more we talk about the exodus from Egypt, the more praiseworthy we are.”*

However, while retelling the story of Pesach is important, it is not enough. Since its founding Judaism has insisted that people not only teach its traditions but engage with them as well. This is particularly so during Pesach when we are told, *“In every generation, you must see yourself as if you came out of Egypt.”*

One of the greatest challenges of Pesach is relating to slavery in Egypt, a world and time far removed. Unfortunately, slavery is closer than many of us realize. This year ATZUM’s **T**ask **F**orce on **H**uman **T**rafficking invites you to bring greater meaning and depth to your Pesach by examining the modern slavery that persists among us.

## Marika’s Story – Ukraine/Israel

Marika set out from Ukraine with the plan of working in Tel-Aviv as a waitress. Though she had heard stories of girls being trafficked and sold into prostitution, Marika believed she was safe because she arranged the job through a recruitment agency. The agency even arranged her travel plans; she would fly from Kyiv to Vienna, switch planes and fly to Cyprus, where she would board another plane for Cairo. Once in Egypt she would be driven overland to Tel-Aviv.

Marika knew something was wrong when she landed in Egypt. A Russian man met her at the airport. He took her firmly by the arm and led her to a car where three other frightened women were sitting. *“I said I wanted to go back home. The Russian pig hit me across the face very hard and told me to shut up. My mouth was bleeding and I began to weep.”*

The driver dropped the women off at a village where Bedouin guides ordered them to start walking across the Sinai Desert. They walked for two days. *“It was so hot and we were so very thirsty, but the Arab men taking us across the desert did not care. They kept shouting at us. I have no idea what they were saying. They just yelled. I felt what it must have been like for the slaves in the time of the Bible. With every step, I thought I was being punished by God for my past sins.”*

After being smuggled into Israel, Marika was purchased by a pimp for \$10,000. She was taken to an apartment in Tel-Aviv where she was told that she would be his property until she worked off a \$20,000 debt. She would begin working off the debt that very evening.

*That night, I felt for the first time what it was to be a whore. I had to service eight men. I felt so terrible and ashamed. I showered after every encounter but I could not wash away the filth in me. Over the next four months, I don't know how many hundreds of Israeli men I was forced to have sex with. Young men, old men, fat, disgusting men, soldiers, husbands, and religious men. It did not matter if I was sick or if I was on my period. I had to work or I would be punished."*

*\* From Victor Malareck's The Natashas: Inside the New Global Sex Trade*

## Sex Slavery

Sex trafficking and prostitution occur all over the world. Victims of the sex trade are typically members of vulnerable populations, often victims of rape and incest as children. They are often poor or homeless, come from broken homes, and are victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Many are adolescents who have run away. Pimps and traffickers target these children and women precisely because of their vulnerability. They coerce them into the sex trade with a combination of abuse and false promises for stability, security, and love.

Once in the flesh trade, they are exposed to extreme physical, emotional, and sexual trauma. Oppressors employ coercion, deception, fraud, abduction, threats, violence, and economic leverage such as debt bondage to enslave individuals. Neither prostituted persons nor victims of trafficking have chosen this life for themselves, and the vast majority asserts they would leave the sex trade if they could.

### Alma's Story - Philippines

Alma came to Olongapo City, a thriving U.S. military base, in 1984 to study to be an accountant. Her brother had promised to help pay her tuition, but upon her arrival he confessed that he had no intention to put her through school. Instead, he hoped that she would "strike it lucky," marry an American serviceman, and support her family.

Alma was dismayed by her brother's betrayal, but she had two young children to provide for and needed an income. After a few months, she agreed to work in a local bar as a waitress. Although she worked seven days a week, it was still a struggle to support her family. Occasionally servicemen would offer her their company, but despite pressure from her brother Alma always refused.

*One day, a serviceman offered the manager a "bar-fine" for me. I refused, saying that I was just a waitress. The manager told me that if I didn't go, I would lose my job. I was scared that my children and I would end up homeless and hungry, so I reluctantly agreed. The American wanted to rent a hotel room, but I told him to give me the money he would spend on a room and accompany me home instead. I sent*

*my children to my parents because I did not want them to see what their mother was doing to make a living.*

*\* From Equality Now's Survivor Stories Series*

## **Repairing the World - Tikkun Olam**

Merely remembering our slavery and empathizing with others in modern slavery is not enough. Pesach's central character is Moses, a man who took it upon himself to end the suffering of a people. Though Moses occupied a position of freedom and privilege as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, he also recognized the suffering of others and advocated for freedom and justice. Moses understood that his freedom did not exempt him from struggling against oppression. This holiday we encourage you to both celebrate your freedom and to use it to fight for the freedom of others.

On the last page of this packet there is a list of just a few of the many ways that you and your community can join the fight against sex trafficking and prostitution.

### **Grace's Story – Nigeria/Germany**

Grace came from a poor family in Nigeria. When she was 18, her father told her that as a woman “she was predestined by God to save her family from poverty by going to Europe to earn money.” Grace believed that she was going to Germany to work as a babysitter or waitress.

*A “trolley-man” accompanied me and a bunch of other women being taken to various countries in Europe to a hotel to organize our travel documents. I was given the passport of an African woman from a different country and then transported with another woman to Germany. Once I arrived, I was told that my debt was 50,000 euro, which I realized would take a very long time to repay. My family's contact then told me that to pay the debt, I would be working as a prostitute in brothels (which are legalized in Germany). It was then that I realized that my family's contact was a madam. I refused and called my parents to explain what was happening, but they told me to obey her and do whatever she told me to do. I didn't have any papers and didn't know my rights. She said that if I asked anyone for help, I would be deported, so I didn't think I had any choice but to become a prostitute.*

*I worked day and night for months, doing everything they asked me in order to get the money for my madam, and every day I cried. At a well-known legal brothel, the owners told me directly that I had to have sex without condoms, otherwise I would be fired. The owners would ask the clients afterwards if they were happy, if I willingly serviced them without a condom. My madam wanted me to do it without a condom. She said that I was no better than the other girls, and I should do what the brothels wanted to earn more and pay her back. I wouldn't be able to pay off the debt if I couldn't work, so I did it. The women here are so desperate for money that they don't care about AIDS—people here are ready to die. This is blood money, and it was killing me, too.*

*\* From Equality Now's Survivor Stories Series*

## A Final Thought

This Pesach, while you are celebrating your freedom please take a moment to think about those who are still in bondage, some of whom might be in your own neighborhood. By recognizing and confronting modern slavery, we can better understand our own history of enslavement and oppression and the responsibilities that freedom brings.

The bodies and souls that risk all to reach the promised land of freedom need now grow the hands and hearts to abolish modern slavery. Next year in Jerusalem and everywhere no more trafficking; no more abuse of the bodies of our sisters --- then we will be free at last.

## Take Action

### 1. Learn more about the issue -

Prostitution Research and Education – This site calls for the eradication of prostitution and for providing prostituted persons with viable alternatives.

Machon Todaa – This site provides visitors with up-to-date information about prostitution in Israel.

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women – This site gives an overview of prostitution and sex trafficking around the world.

**2. Ask your rabbi to address the issue in a sermon** - Help to raise awareness in your community about sexual exploitation by asking your rabbi to address the issue.

**3. Volunteer** - Partner with one of the many organizations working to end this form of sexual exploitation. Most organizations depend on committed volunteers to support and advance their efforts. Individuals can help by donating their time, money, or skills. Contact local organizations to find out how you and your community can help.

**4. Contact your legislators** - Your voice counts! Stay up-to-date about relevant legislation and actively support initiatives that hold sex buyers, pimps, and traffickers accountable, and provide sex trade victims with resources and alternatives. You and your community can make impact by calling, writing, and meeting with your local legislators.

**5. Fight Sex Slavery in Israel** - Join ATZUM's Task Force on Human Trafficking campaign to bring the Nordic Model to Israel. The Nordic Model criminalizes the act of purchasing sexual services and decriminalizes the provider, thereby reducing the demand for sex trafficking and prostitution. In addition, it provides assistance and support for victims of the sex trade. The Nordic Model has been adopted by Sweden, Iceland, and Norway, and has proven to be so effective at reducing trafficking and prostitution that the European Union is considering adopting it.

If you have five minutes a week and are committed to ending sex slavery Project 119, TFHT's international campaign to bring the Nordic Model to Israel, is for you! To learn more about the campaign

and other ways to volunteer please visit our Project 119 website: <http://atzum.org/projects/task-force-on-human-trafficking/project-119/>.

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