

We Were Slaves to Pharaoh in *Mitzrayim*

Slavery... Today

**A Look at the International
Slave Market Today**

Three millennia have passed since the Jewish nation was wondrously liberated from its centuries of enslavement in Egypt. Slavery, as a globally accepted institution, persisted only until recent times, when it has been strongly denounced and much effort has been made to uproot it. Despite those efforts, however, there are—shockingly—more slaves today than perhaps at any previous time in the history of the world... as many as 27 million!

When we sit down to our *Seder* and recite “And if *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had not taken our fathers out of *Mitzrayim*, we and our children and grandchildren would still be enslaved,” most of us don’t realize how literally true that is.

Let’s take a closer look at modern slavery and how it continues to flourish around the world, and use it as an opportunity to reflect on how fortunate we are, even in the modern era, not to be enslaved.

Every *Pesach* even many otherwise estranged Jews pause to sit down in front of some *matzos* and wine and read passages from the Haggadah that tell us to visualize ourselves as former slaves who were just freed from bondage. Indeed, every act of the evening revolves around this theme.

Today, we are fortunate that the *Seder* is celebrated around the world in countries where Jews need not fear to exhibit their faith openly. Most of us live in countries where freedom of religion is guaranteed by law and largely accepted by society. Even in countries where religious dissidence can be dangerous, from Venezuela to Iran, at least there is little threat of forced servitude.

In fact, to the modern mind the word slavery has become obsolete, the relic of a bygone era. Slavery belonged to primitive times, to the Dark Ages. Today, in the modern world, slavery does not exist... right?

Think again! Studies suggest that there are more slaves around the world today than at any previous point in the history of the world!

Today, almost 150 years after President Lincoln pushed through the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution forbidding slavery—65 years after the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 4th Article expressly forbids slavery—as many as 27 million people around the world are enslaved! Half of those are under the age of 18!

Illegal, but a Slave Nonetheless

In our minds, a slave is someone bound with chains by the hands and feet. However, that image is inaccurate. Many slaves today are not held by physical restraints. Yet, their bondage is just as real. They are forced into slave labor, or face being subject to acts of violence against themselves or close family members. Their owners



A slave auction platform in Campbell County, Virginia. Slaves were presented before potential buyers and were then sold to the highest bidder.

Name	Sex	Age	Particulars	Price
John A. Smith	M	25	well to do	125
John Jones	M	30	well to do	150
John Brown	M	28	well to do	140
John White	M	32	well to do	160
John Black	M	29	well to do	155
John Green	M	31	well to do	165
John Grey	M	27	well to do	145
John Gold	M	33	well to do	170
John Silver	M	26	well to do	135
John Lead	M	34	well to do	175
John Tin	M	24	well to do	130
John Copper	M	35	well to do	180
John Iron	M	23	well to do	125
John Steel	M	36	well to do	185
John Nickel	M	22	well to do	120
John Zinc	M	37	well to do	190
John Cobalt	M	21	well to do	115
John Vanadium	M	38	well to do	195
John Chromium	M	20	well to do	110
John Manganese	M	39	well to do	200
John Silicon	M	19	well to do	105
John Boron	M	40	well to do	205
John Calcium	M	18	well to do	100
John Magnesium	M	41	well to do	210
John Strontium	M	17	well to do	95
John Barium	M	42	well to do	215
John Bismuth	M	16	well to do	90
John Polonium	M	43	well to do	220
John Astatine	M	15	well to do	85
John Tellurium	M	44	well to do	225
John Selenium	M	14	well to do	80
John Tellurium	M	45	well to do	230
John Iodine	M	13	well to do	75
John Bromine	M	46	well to do	235
John Chlorine	M	12	well to do	70
John Fluorine	M	47	well to do	240
John Neon	M	11	well to do	65
John Argon	M	48	well to do	245
John Krypton	M	10	well to do	60
John Xenon	M	49	well to do	250
John Radon	M	9	well to do	55
John Francium	M	50	well to do	255
John Actinium	M	8	well to do	50
John Thorium	M	51	well to do	260
John Protactinium	M	7	well to do	45
John Uranium	M	52	well to do	265
John Neptunium	M	6	well to do	40
John Plutonium	M	53	well to do	270
John Americium	M	5	well to do	35
John Curium	M	54	well to do	275
John Berkelium	M	4	well to do	30
John Californium	M	55	well to do	280
John Einsteinium	M	3	well to do	25
John Fermium	M	56	well to do	285
John Mendelevium	M	2	well to do	20
John Nobelium	M	57	well to do	290
John Lawrencium	M	1	well to do	15
John Rutherfordium	M	58	well to do	295
John Dubnium	M	0	well to do	10
John Seaborgium	M	59	well to do	300
John Bohrium	M	-1	well to do	5
John Hassium	M	60	well to do	305
John Meitnerium	M	-2	well to do	0
John Darmstadtium	M	61	well to do	310
John Roentgenium	M	-3	well to do	-5
John Copernicium	M	62	well to do	315
John Tennessine	M	-4	well to do	-10
John Oganesson	M	63	well to do	320

Part of a document dated 1874 in Charleston, South Carolina, from a slave trader covering the 118 slaves he sold and the prices he received for each.

may confiscate their passports so they cannot return to their homeland and they are threatened with punishments worse than death should they attempt to escape.

At the same time, even the worst form of slavery, the ancient practice of treating human beings as chattel, still exists. There are slave markets around the world where people are sold to an owner who will force them to work while they are bound by chains

under the threat of punishment or death should they try to leave. The only difference is that in the past, slavery was officially sanctioned and protected by law whereas today it is not. For the slave, though, this technicality makes no difference.

Virtually every culture in history on every continent practiced slavery for thousands of years. In the United States, 12 million Africans were forced to work for their masters between the years 1619 and 1865. Most of the country's beautiful, historical government buildings were constructed by slaves—including the White House and Capitol. It took a disastrous Civil War and an amendment to the Constitution to finally abolish slavery once and for all.

Today, slave trading is barred by international law. Since 1817 more than 10 international treaties have been signed to forbid transactions involving slaves. No country today officially permits slavery (the last country, Mauritania, banned slavery in 2007). Nevertheless, illegal though it may be, slavery continues to be practiced – often with the tacit consent of corrupt authorities.

The modern form of slavery can be found in every country in the world, even right here in the United States. The US State Department estimates that 17,500 slaves are smuggled annually into America alone! They may be forced to do difficult farm labor or to attend to their master in his home, just like the slaves of old. (Read about one such case that became an international sensation just a few years ago in our follow-up article.)

Not long ago the media reported that a slave-smuggling operation was discovered in Florida's tomato fields. In one case the slaves were held in a truck that transported them to the fields. They were permitted outside the truck only while they were engaged in field work. Then they were forced to return to the truck and remain there overnight, locked inside. To allow air in, the slaves had to drill their own hole in the roof. Reporters who visited one tomato field found heavy chains and a bloody shirt belonging to one worker who was beaten after he dared open his mouth.

Slavery remains active around the world. In India children are forced to carry heavy bricks. In Pakistan young ones are forced to weave carpets. In Ivory Coast kids are beaten and starved on the cacao plantations. In America unfortunate immigrants are forced to work in the homes of wealthy families or in the fields. In the case of domestic slaves, many of the masters are from Egypt or other Arab lands where maintaining slaves remains a common practice. It is difficult for them to part from this cultural norm.

There are countries in the world where people are drafted into slavery by powerful organizations, or even by the government itself. Several African countries use the services of forced child soldiers. In South America slaves are forced to harvest crops which are the sold in the United States or other developed countries. These forced



Unknown until recently, the Florida tomatoes you ate for years were picked by slaves.



A slave harvests tomatoes in Florida.

