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**¬**very *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

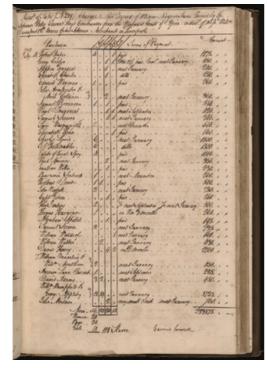
bondage is just as real. They are forced into slave labor, or face being subject to acts of violence against themselves

> 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.



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.

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