

Learning about slavery and human rights

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“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.”

The quotation above is Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet no matter how many times our and other nations outlaw slavery, it persists. This teaching is meant to help communities to start to answer the following questions:

- How can slavery exist in our midst?
- What do we need to know in order to take action to end slavery?
- What is the connection between Judaism and modern-day slavery?
- How can I help to end slavery?

The following materials are needed for the teaching:

1. A copy of Ron Soodalter’s article entitled “A Blight on the Nation: Slavery in Today’s America” for each participant, which can be downloaded from the RHR-NA website at <http://www.rhr-na.org/files/Slavery-in-America.pdf>
2. A copy of the Slavery Fact Sheet, which can be downloaded from the RHR-NA website.
3. A copy for each participant of the attached ***Improvisational Acting Rules*** handout.
4. A copy of a *Humash* for each participant.
5. A large copy of the above Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, posted at the front of the room for all to see.

Procedure and Time Needed

The teaching will be from 60 to 90 minutes in length, depending on whether or not participants read the Soodalter article ahead of time.

1. If participants have not read the Soodalter article before the session, give them 20 minutes to do so. Upon finishing, ask participants if they need any **clarification** about what they read. Be clear that they **are not discussing** the article at this time—you will be discussing it later in the session—but

- rather, you just want to be sure everyone has **understood** what they have read.
2. Ask participants to look at Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Explain that this document was written in 1948 and has been ratified by all the nations of the world. Ask participants to suggest meanings that can be gleaned from Article 4 and to pose any questions the Article raises for them. Examples might be: it means that if someone owes money, you can't take their labor for free to pay off the debt; it means that you can't sell yourself into servitude to another, that you have to be paid for your labor; why would anyone think there could be slavery?; it means that you have the right to leave your job when you want, etc. **This is not meant to be a discussion.** Rather, it is an opportunity for participants to flesh out what "no slavery" means.
 3. Explain that participants will next do an experiential exercise. They will create a skit of **3-5 minutes** in length to **demonstrate what free labor looks like**. They will create their skits in groups of **2-5 people**.
 - a. Give participants the *Improvisational Acting Rules* handout. Read with participants. Underscore that there is no talking and there are no props.
 - b. Divide the group up into groups of 2-5 each. Ideally, you'll have some two-person and some five-person groups.
 - c. Tell the participants the title of their scenes is *A Snapshot of Free Labor*. Give them 5 minutes to plan their scenes. The planning should be very basic: not every action each person will make but generally identifying where they are, who is the boss, the workers, the type of work they are doing, and how the notion of freedom will be demonstrated.
 - i. You can give suggestions if needed to the individual groups, such as someone quitting their job, someone being paid for a day's work, looking at the clock and packing up after a day's labor, etc.
 - d. Bring the groups back together to "perform" their scenes. Tell participants that their job as audience members is to guess what they've witnessed, eg. pay day, quitting, etc. that relates to free labor. It's always nice to clap after a scene has been performed.
 4. After all the scenes have been performed, ask participants to suggest contrasts between what they saw in the scenes and what they read in the Soodalter article. Facilitate this discussion for about 15 minutes.
 5. Give participants the **Slavery Fact Sheet** and a Humash. Review the Fact Sheet and ask participants: ***Do the sources indicate that there is a Jewish imperative to take action on modern-day slavery?*** Facilitate this discussion. Be sure to ask if there is more information that participants might need to be able to answer this question. ***For more background on the***

Jewish view of slavery, please visit: http://www.rhr-na.org/kvod_habriot/home

6. Invite participants to brainstorm actions that they might be willing to take individuals to eliminate modern-day slavery. What actions might they wish their community would take? Responses can be as individual and passive as not buying products they know are made by slave labor to as global as sponsoring a letter writing campaign to the IMF to direct more resources toward micro-business development in the developing world to begin to fight the conditions that cause people to sell themselves or their children into slavery, for example.
7. Consider concluding the session with one of the following:
 - a. Singing "Let My People Go"
 - b. Singing *Esa eynay* and reading Psalm 121
 - c. Planning a meeting for further discussion and learning
 - d. Planning an action plan meeting

Improvisational Acting Rules

Below are a few “rules” of Improv. That will help you create believable and comprehensible scenes even if you’ve never acted before!

- 1. IF YOU BELIEVE IT, SO WILL YOUR AUDIENCE.** If you believe you are digging a ditch or taking dictation, so will your audience. You just have to put it in your mind and body. **If you believe yourself that you are actually doing what you are pretending to do, then your audience will have no trouble following your performance.**
- 2. KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Keep your movements minimal enough so that your audience gets the picture and is not straining to understand what you are doing. While *you* should know that you are planting carrot seeds on a 40-acre farm in rural Georgia, all your audience needs to know is that you are planting seeds. Remember: be specific with your actions.
- 3. COMMIT!** If you are sewing shirts in a sweatshop, do not suddenly start playing musical instrument. Finish what you start.
- 4. CREATE YOUR PROPS AND DO NOT TRIP OVER THEM.** If you need a table, allow there to be one in a particular place in the room. Do not forget it is there and walk through it when you get out of your chair and walk out of the room. If you walk through tables, walls, or bathtubs, your audience will not believe you.
- 5. CREATE YOUR SPACE.** If you are in a restaurant kitchen or office suite, for example, be aware of your space: how large or small, how low the ceiling, is there a carpeting on the floor, and so on. Put imaginary props in the space to define it better.
- 6. BE SPONTANEOUS.** In improvisation there is no script. You know who you are, where you are, your relationship to the other players, and the title of the scene. Do not think too much about things like who enters the scene when someone is combing her or his hair. Just go with it.
- 7. MAKE YOUR SCENE PARTNERS LOOK GREAT.** Your scenes will be best if all of the players do their part and look good, so if someone offers you an imaginary cup of tea, take it and drink! **You cannot use words (do not pantomime talking),** but you can put your hands in a “thanks” attitude or put your arm around another person to show your thoughts and feelings.