

Angels on the Path

By Rabbi Debra Orenstein

This year, as many of you know, I took on a big goal, thanks to my daughter: freeing 100 slaves.

In the last few months, I have found amazing amounts of support and help, often from unexpected sources. Let me share just a few examples with you.

- One month after I set my goal, three one-day conferences on human trafficking were announced in the New York/New Jersey area. I was able to attend two personally and CBI members involved in our Social Action Committee attended the third. (Two CBI members were featured in an article about that conference in the local press.) The Social Action Committee stepped in quickly and wholeheartedly to fight human trafficking around the Superbowl. CBI member Dan Dank shared with me his daughter's remarkable work on human trafficking.
- Just as I realized that I would need to find new ways to reach to out more people in order to reach my goal, I got an email from the *Jewish Standard* asking me to write a regular column. My first two columns have been on the subject of freeing slaves.
- A lovely woman from an Orthodox organization called and asked me for help in organizing a women's group. Since we were complete strangers to one another, it struck me as odd that she chose a Conservative rabbi, of all people, to ask for this favor. But there was something so sweet and heartfelt in her approach that I agreed to help. It was she who told me about the Baer Family, the folks who spoke at CBI on April 4 about their work rescuing and educating former child slaves in Ghana. I was a complete stranger to the Baers when I called them, and they agreed right away to come and speak at CBI.
- I was so touched by Kevin Bales' books *Disposable People*, *The Slave Next Door*, and *Ending Slavery* that I sought an introduction to the non-profit he started: Free the Slaves. As it happens, Rabbi Rachel Troster, daughter-in-law of CBI members Susan and Marty Pelavin, chairs the Rabbinical Assembly Social Action Committee on which I serve. She graciously gave me an introduction to the Executive Director of Free the Slaves, Maurice Middleton.
- Maurice, too, was most generous. The 15-minute phone appointment we scheduled stretched to almost an hour, because he was so open to my ideas and referrals. I was able to put Maurice in touch with Evan Robbins, who was a guest speaker, together with the Baer family, at CBI. It turns out that both Free the Slaves (freetheslaves.net), Maurice's organization, and Breaking the Chain Through Education (btcte.org), Evan's organization, rescue children from enslavement by fishermen on Lake Volta in Ghana. They are eager to get to know one another and find ways to collaborate.

- I found a wonderful and under-utilized website, jchoice.org, which enables Jews to donate to a variety of Jewish and non-sectarian causes, *as Jews*, and to set up pages to promote charities about which they are particularly passionate. When I called the number listed on the website, it was not working. I dug deeper on the site, found a number that differed by one digit, and reached a wrong number – the Jewish Federation of Boston. The woman who answered the phone happened to know the Director of Jchoice, Josh Troderman, and, surprisingly, gave me his personal cell phone number! I called, and he spent 40 minutes with me on the phone explaining the website, and then apologized because he had to go. He was on a deadline.
- I launched a group within the site called Jews Freeing Slaves to provide support for outstanding organizations that are working to rescue slaves and end slavery. Of course, to do that, I needed some more help, so I called Josh back. He was again amazingly helpful and wildly generous.

In our second phone call, I realized that I know Josh's mother. She was one of the first people to support my work on the *Lifecycles* book series with a grant. I was also able to recommend a funding source for Jchoice, so that more people can learn about this amazing resource.

Are you getting the idea yet? Not only did people help and support me, they blessed me. And occasionally, very easily, almost effortlessly, I was able to bless them. We also came to one another at just the right time.

Sometimes, when you find just the mitzvah that you are meant to be doing, life is like that. Synchronicities and even miracles happen. The anointing is palpable.

The Talmud says: "Bederech she'adam holech molichin oto - a person is directed in the way he should go." Literally, the phrase can be translated: In the way that a person goes, they lead him. The ancient rabbis ponder: Who is this mysterious "they" who lead us? And they answer with a pun: "Molichin oto, malachim ito. 'They lead him' really means 'there are angels (divine and human messengers) with him.'"

I don't know if my daughter and I will be able to free 100 slaves this year. But this I do know: there are angels with us on our path.