

# Answers on Slavery

## Answers To Questions Frequently Asked About the System of Slavery Known as Trokosi

Does slavery really still exist even today? Why?

Evil dies hard. Unfortunately slavery exists in many parts of the world today. One of the most active places in the world for child slavery is West Africa. There are several kinds of slavery. Some of it is based on exploiting children for free labor in order to make products cheap and profitable. Some of it is based on exploiting children for the sex and pornography markets. Some of it is based on cultural traditions involving the requirement of a young girl in payment for the services of the priests in shrines of African traditional religion. These girls are called "trokosi," (Ewe spelling troxovi) and it is securing their freedom that Every Child Ministries has undertaken as its first project in fighting child slavery.



A child born into trokosi slavery sits on her mother's lap as they were both liberated from slavery through the gifts & prayers of ECM partners. Freed on Jan. 31, 2003

What does trokosi mean?

Trokosi comes from the tribal Ewe (say Ay-vay) language and means "wives of the gods." The girls are considered to be wives of the idol god who is venerated at the shrine. In practical terms they are concubines and slaves of the priests of those shrines. They must obey his every command no matter what it is, but in turn they get no compensation and no affection.

Where are the trokosi slaves located?

The slaves are located in the southern portion of the Ewe tribe, which lives in the Volta Region of Ghana, and in Togo and Benin, all countries of West Africa. Only in Ghana have any of the slaves been liberated, but we at Every Child Ministries will not rest until every slave is liberated.

Since trokosi has been outlawed in Ghana, why is it still practiced?

Through the efforts and influence of Christians, the practice of trokosi was outlawed in Ghana in 1998. However, it continues because it is not enforced. There are two reasons it is not enforced. The first is the government's natural and appropriate reluctance to interfere with the customs of the people. Trokosi is a cultural injustice. The second and more powerful reason is the widespread fear that anyone who opposes the priests of the shrines will be cursed. The idols of many of the shrines are war gods obtained at a time when the Ewe tribe was seeking help in tribal wars over land issues. The basic function of the idols is to kill, so people live in abject fear of the shrines and the priests who serve there.

The problem of fear is illustrated in an interview Wisdom Mensah had a few years ago with what was then the first lady of Ghana. "Madame Rawlings," he said, "You speak up for women's and children's rights all the time. Why do you not speak up for the trokosi slaves?" She looked aghast and answered, "What? Do you want me to be killed?"

aid the girls after they are released to start a new life. Several Ghanaian national groups having been fighting the practice, but they need help. This heinous practice destroys the lives of innocent children. That's why Every Child Ministries, the Christian mission for the forgotten children of Africa, has now joined our Ghanaian brothers and sisters in the fight.



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## How have some of the trokosi been liberated in Ghana?

They have been liberated through the intervention of Christians who are willing to pay for their release and Several Ghanaian national groups having been fighting the practice, but they need help. This heinous practice destroys the lives of innocent children. That's why Every Child Ministries, the Christian mission for the forgotten children of Africa, has now joined our Ghanaian brothers and sisters in the fight.

## How many trokosi slaves are there?

It is estimated there were about 5,000 trokosi held in shrines in Ghana when Christians began to get involved in the 1980's. On an average each trokosi slave ends up having an average of four children each as a result of being regularly raped by the priest. Although they are not technically considered trokosi, they also serve every whim of the priest without pay so they are in reality slaves as well. Considering this, the system involved about 25,000 lives in Ghana. The number of trokosi in Togo and Benin has never been counted, but we know there are a substantial number.



A young slave girl with her child, born through rape while in slavery, on the day of their liberation

## How many have been released?

As of January 2012, a total of 3,300 trokosi had been released through the intervention of Christians, thus freeing a total of 16,500 lives. As of this date, an estimated 1,700 remain bound to the shrines, involving slavery of 8,500 lives in Ghana alone, plus an untold number in the neighboring countries of Togo and Benin. Until the practice is totally abolished, the number enslaved can continue to grow, because the slaves frequently give birth as a result of rape and because new girls can still be taken into the shrines. On the other hand, the number does not diminish through death, for the priests insist that every crime must continually be atoned for until the end of time. No matter how petty the original offense, when one trokosi dies, her family is obliged to replace her with another. Therefore, except for Christians liberating these slaves, the number must always grow and can never be diminished on its own.

## How are the slaves treated?

Horrendously, almost always. They are worked hard and denied food and/or whipped if they do not meet their scheduled quota of work. Usually this involves hoeing the priest's fields all day with a short-handled hand hoe. The girls are made to understand that they will be cursed and die if they ever eat a single bite of grain from the fields. At night some of them stand over the priest, fanning him to keep away flies. At bedtime or whenever he desires, they are summoned for sexual services. If they refuse or if they displease him or sometimes for no discernible reason at all, they are starved, whipped, or made to kneel for hours on shards of broken glass. They are never shown any affection, even when the priest is having sex with them. Many of the girls have confided to us that they felt absolutely worthless while in the trokosi system.

## Why are so many of the slaves children?

Although many of the girls were taken into slavery just before or at puberty, many also were taken as young as four years old. We have met one who was taken so young that they had to make special arrangements for her mother to continue breastfeeding her. Of course, they grow up, and so the trokosi at the time of liberation may be any age. In addition, the girls have an average of four children each as a result of being regularly raped by the priest and sometimes by his relatives. These children are born into slavery. We have talked to many young adults for whom the dehumanizing life of the shrine form their earliest memories. Whatever the age, slavery wastes and destroys precious human lives!

## What happens to the girls after they are freed?

After liberation the girls who are of adult age are given the opportunity to receive vocational training. The girls are given an introduction to various skills by which they can make a living. They can learn dressmaking, soapmaking, dying cloth, baking, catering, hairdressing, or traditional kente cloth weaving. They also learn to cook traditional Ghanaian dishes in order to prepare them for normal life. They also begin literacy training, receive counseling, attend chapel, and have the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of them do choose to become Christians. Later many of them go into business for themselves.

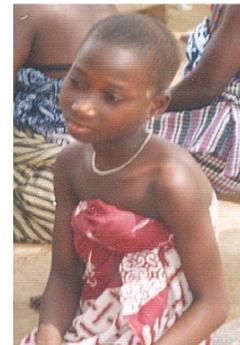
An attempt is made at reconciliation with their families, and this sometimes succeeds. Some of the girls are able to return to their home villages. At other times the families still refuse them. When the families refuse them and the girls are too young for the vocational training center, special efforts are made to place them with Christian families. Every Child Ministries' Haven of Hope Home is open to very young ones who need a stable, loving Christian home. ECM Counselors continuously visit them for friendship, encouragement, and teaching.



Akpabli, sent to the shrine at age 3 because the gods were angry that her relatives did not thank them for helping them find a missing fishing boat. After a lifetime of misery, liberated at last with ECM's help.



Alice was raped by the priest and bore her first child at age 13. She never learned why she was sent to the shrine. After long years of misery, Alice was finally freed at last.



This lovely young girl seems so quiet, so modest. Can you imagine the horror she must have experienced in being raped by the priest? She truly needs God's healing touch to recover.

Above: Three trokosi slaves of different ages who were liberated through the prayers and gifts of Every Child Ministries' partners on January 31, 2003.

## How is my “freedom money” used?

In cases where freedom is negotiated, a small payment is made to the priest for each girl. Although he is free to use the money as he pleases, some have said they would buy corn mills with which they make money, since in freeing the slaves the priest loses a way of making a profit. Freedom money is also used to share the Gospel in a deep, personal way with priests. Some choose Christ and desire to free their slaves. Some of the money is used to facilitate the negotiations which result eventually in the release of slaves and the ending of slavery in a given area. Some of the money is used for counseling to help prepare the girls for a life of freedom that some of them have never known. Other money is used for the liberation ceremony in which the girls are given their freedom. This is a public ceremony which facilitates the re-entry of the girls into the wider community. Finally, some of the money is used to help the girls start new lives after release.



A standard bearer carries the clan emblem as a chief and elders arrive at a liberation ceremony, January 31, 2003.

## Will the purchase of freedom for some slaves only perpetuate the cycle of slavery and misery?

This is a truly legitimate concern. It was one of our first concerns in considering this project, but it is an unnecessary fear. In Ghana, not one single shrine area has taken new slaves or re-enslaved former slaves after release. This is partly because of the 1998 law making *trokosi* a crime, and partly because of the way in which the slaves are released. Rather than working for individual release, we work for a community-wide agreement to release all the slaves in given shrines and to end slavery permanently in those areas. Every area that releases its slaves adds to the pressure of public opinion to help influence other areas to do the same. Your “freedom money” in no way perpetuates slavery, but does much to end it. This is ECM’s goal—an END to the suffering and shame, with freedom and healing for all of the victims. This is a big job, but possible through Jesus, the Great Healer.

## Are all the slaves held in the shrines forever?

Many of the shrines hold the *trokosi* slaves in the shrines for the rest of their lives. They are sent to the fields to work, of course, and sometimes to the market, but there’s little worry of them escaping. Hardly anybody would be courageous enough to help them, for fear of being cursed by the gods themselves. And if they do escape, the priest will send a curse to bring all kinds of misfortune and even death on them. Whether or not the curse works, when misfortune comes their way, they will fear for their lives and return to the shrine again, where terrible punishment will await them.

Some of the shrines theoretically require only a certain number of years of servitude, but in reality the family is seldom able to pay the high fees demanded for return to the family, so in practicality few ever escape this situation.

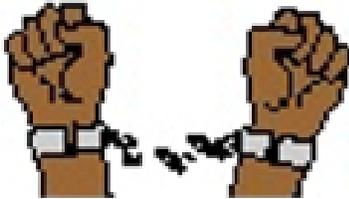
Other shrines have taken so many slaves that they can no longer live in the shrine, so after a certain number of years they are granted “temporary release.” This allows them to physically leave the shrine and live in another close-by area approved by the shrine. Sometimes they can even get married, though only to a partner approved by the shrine and of course, one who brings many gifts to the shrine and serves the gods of the shrine. While on temporary release, the slaves are still considered the property of the shrine, and must get the priest’s permission to do anything. They must come whenever he calls, do whatever he says, and return to the shrine for the festivals, when they must bring expensive offerings that basically require all year to get together, and worship the idol god at the festivals. Although the women may hear the Gospel while out in the villages on temporary release, most are afraid to listen and nearly all fear to become Christians, because they know they still belong to the shrine and the idol god. Liberation is still necessary in order to break the cultural and spiritual bondage and to release the women from fear and from all obligations to the shrine.

## How is this project important for the spreading of the Gospel?

For hundreds of years the Ewe tribe has been bound by idolatry. Now God has prepared a group of people who know first hand what idolatry is all about. They have seen it all close up. They have lived day by day with the priests. After these girls are released, do you think they want to have anything to do with idolatry? Not a chance! Remember, their lives were torn from them in a futile attempt to atone for some misdeed until the end of time. When these girls learn that Jesus ALREADY PAID the full sacrifice for our sins, and that God has accepted His sacrifice as FULL and COMPLETE, well, you can imagine that this is good news indeed!

Every girl is free to choose her religious affiliation, of course, but many of them choose Jesus Christ and become fiery and devoted followers of His. It is tragic that these girls underwent the sufferings that they did endure, but God is using it to open up a new and better way for the Ewe tribe. This is a strategic project that helps individuals and beyond that, is opening up the Gospel for an entire tribe which spreads over three countries.

## How did Every Child Ministries get involved in the “Freedom Train” project?



During one of ECM’s teacher training seminars in 1999, an advocate for the trokosi came to us and began telling us about the problem. When we understood that African children were being enslaved, we were immediately interested. On investigation, we found that the problem was very real and learned about some of the efforts Ghanaians were already making to release the girls. We became gripped with the needs

of the girls, and with our Board’s approval signed participatory agreements with one of the Ghanaian groups. Since then, we’ve been working together on this project and finding that an amazing synergy occurs when God’s people work together.

It is also interesting how one of the groups got involved in the project. A new governor was appointed to the Volta Region some years back. He became concerned about the low level of development in the area and began to ask why in a fairly progressive country like Ghana one area should remain underdeveloped. After investigation, he began to realize that the underdevelopment was tied closely to beliefs and practices involving idolatry, and especially to the practice of slavery. Having come to that conclusion, he approached a Christian group to ask if Christians might be interested in working to stop the practice of trokosi slavery. This man was not even a Christian believer! Isn’t it amazing the insights that God gave him?

## How could anyone possibly oppose the liberation of the slaves?

The main opponent of the liberation of the trokosi is the Afrikania Mission, sometimes called the Afrikan Renaissance Mission. The name “mission” makes it sound like a Christian group, but we have found that one of our workers made a pretty fair assessment of them. He said that they look for devotees of any god or goddess (but not the Creator, the God of the Bible), and then seek to strengthen them. The group was started by a Catholic priest who became disenchanted with the church because of the strength of African traditional religion and ended up converting to it. The group maintains a considerable presence on the web and is very active in Ghana. Having many educated people on their team, they are constantly writing and presenting conferences on the glories of African traditional religion. They speak often in public places and have nothing good to say about Christianity.

They use several contradictory lines of reasoning. One is that trokosi is not really slavery. Sometimes they even claim that the girls are treated like queens! I challenge them to tell that face-to-face to any girl who has been a trokosi. It reminds us of the claim of the old American slave masters that their slaves were really more like a part of their family. Yea, sure.

The Afrikania group says that trokosi is just a part of their traditional practice, and as such, it should be preserved. We at ECM say that all cultures have some features that should be discarded. After all, if we must preserve ALL culture, then we must preserve every horrendous invention humanity has ever come up with. For that matter, slavery was a part of American culture, too. Thank God we did not preserve it.

Another Afrikania line says the trokosi are heroines because they are single-handedly keeping their communities from disaster by averting the anger of the gods. At other times, however, they deny that the practice even exists, and accuse Christians of dressing up their members as priests and slaves in order to fool the public. This, of course, is ludicrous, since the liberations are performed publicly, with local chiefs, elders, and government officials present. Are they saying all these people are in on the charade? It's pretty insulting when you think of it. It's only the stark fear of the killer gods of the shrines that keeps the public from revolting against such insolence.

The Afrikania group is a big promoter of the SANKOFA of "Back to our Roots" movement. There is of course potential value in such a movement, for we all profit from understanding our heritage. However, the problem is that in their thinking, African culture is rooted in the worship of the ancestral gods, so they end up promoting idolatry and even slavery. They go back to SOME of their roots, but stop far short of going back to our original roots, for the taproot of humanity was the day when God created our original parents, enduing us all with dignity and freedom.

The question we have to ask is, do the people of the Afrikania Mission value their traditional ways of life more than they value the freedom and the lives of the girls who are held in bondage? Have they not chosen their idols rather than the true and living God? Are they not slaves of a different kind? These people also need our prayers. Recently we have seen, however, that sometimes when those who oppose us receive more information, they do see things more clearly and even come over to help free the girls whose liberation they once opposed. So keep these people in your prayers. God loves them too, and would offer them freedom as well.



A banner publicly advertises the first slave liberation funded by Every Child Ministries. These things are not done in secret.

### What does it cost to free one slave?

The exact amount varies and cannot be predicted in advance. Because we need to have funding in hand to even begin negotiations, we have estimated the cost based on past experience. It costs about \$200 to free one trokosi and help her start a new life. All her children go free with her, so it ends up costing about \$40 per person when we consider the children as well. Additional expenses may be incurred in offering vocational training to the girls. So depending on the size of the group, your goal may be \$40 for one child to \$200 for one "family" or more. Of course, donations in any amount always help and are deeply appreciated. Over and over as we have interviewed young women who have been victimized by the practice of trokosi, they have pleaded with us to do all we can to help liberate other girls still held in the shrines against their will. Their lives are being destroyed. They have suffered too long. Your help can make the difference that can set them on the road to healing, restoration, and a normal, productive life. Please help in any way you can!



Symbol of the Sankofa "Back to our Roots" movement.



### Doesn't this interfere with their freedom of religion?

Good question. We affirm the right to freedom of religion for everyone, including those who choose to worship in the shrines of African Traditional Religion. As Christians we do not try to impose our religion on anyone because we understand that it was God Himself who created us with the right to choose. It is a part of our personhood, and we would never deny anyone that right. However, every person's freedom stops short of enslaving another person. One person's freedom stops where another's begins. These girls should have freedom, too. No one has the right to enslave another! We have interviewed many, and so far, not one has given consent to a life of servitude. The truth is, tokosi in the shrines have no freedom of religion at all. By liberating them from servitude, we are giving them back the dignity of

freedom that God gave them in the beginning.

Further, the liberation does not stop the shrine from functioning. It is still there, and people still consult the idol gods. Liberation does, however, stop the shrines from taking slaves and from taking human sacrifices.

### Why should I get involved?

Your involvement would be a wonderful way to demonstrate that every human life is precious to God. What would you hope others would do if YOU were in slavery? Didn't Jesus tell us, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?"

Besides obedience, your involvement will definitely make a real difference in the lives of some child or woman who may never be freed without your help. If you don't act, she may never have a chance to come to Jesus. You can be a channel of rich blessing to her and her family. Please consider prayerfully what you can do.

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me.  
Because the LORD has anointed Me  
To preach good tidings to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted.  
To proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to those who are  
bound.”

Isaiah 61:1 NKJV

## Freedom Train Project

A Cooperative Project between Every Child Ministries  
and Ghanaian national efforts



*"...proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound..." Isai-ah 61:2*

### **Every Child Ministries** **The Christian mission** **for the forgotten children of Africa**

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[www.ecmafrica.org](http://www.ecmafrica.org)  
[www.realafrikania.com](http://www.realafrikania.com)

*Children are any nation's greatest resource!*  
*A precious treasure from God!*



*A higher standard.*  
*A higher purpose.*