

# Avadim Hayinu / In Praise of Unions

Contributed by [Gilah Langner](#)

Source: Rabbi Gilah Langner, created for the Jews United for Justice Labor Seder 2011

## All recite:

We were slaves to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt, and the Lord our God took us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. And if the Holy One had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, we and our children and our children's children might never have known what was possible.

## Reader continues:

When we arrived on these shores, many of us became factory workers in the garment industry. We were tailors and cutters, finishers and pressers. We were piece workers, pressured to work as fast as humanly possible. Like the slaves in Egypt forced to make our own bricks, we were forced to supply our own materials – needles, thread, and sewing machines. We were men and women, and children as young as six and eight, working in sweatshop. And we were the garment workers in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire who met their deaths one hundred years ago last month.

But we were also organizers. And strikers and picketers. We were beaten and arrested, but we stood strong. We were unionists and marchers, collective bargainers and negotiators. We were the Uprising of the 20,000. We fought for decent wages and decent working conditions. We rallied and we testified. We joined forces with other immigrant groups and across lines of class and religion to win protective laws and jobs we could live with.

Now some of us are without work, some of us have despaired of finding a job, and some of us live in fear that our jobs will end and our lives will be turned upside down. We find ourselves in these situations not because of who we are, but because of decisions made far above us by powerful politicians and corporations. The unions that we fought to create and for which we stood and marched in solidarity have been attacked and undermined. We are called to stand up once more for the rights of all workers and the simple dignity of fair and decent working conditions.

## All recite:

And now, even if we are all wise, and even if we are all clever, even if we no longer all work in sweatshops or live in tenements, we are still duty-bound to remember and retell the stories of our past. And the more we recall what we were able to achieve, working together, hand in hand, the better our future will be.

## *Song: Avadim Hayinu*

*(Traditional melody, new lyrics by Rabbi Gilah Langner)*

*Once we were slaves / in Egyptland*

*Then we were freed / by God's own hand*

*But you can't be free / without proper work*

*A decent wage, a decent place / a boss who's not a jerk*

*We stand with those / who are still in misery*

*Good jobs are the cornerstone of liberty.*

*Chorus: Avadim hayinu, hayinu*

*Ata bnei horin, bnei horin 3x*