



Awakenings ♦ המעורר

Uri L'Tzedek's Monthly Social Justice Torah

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The Issue: Conflict Diamonds



Slave laborers digging for tiny diamonds in Zimbabwe (INS news)

Conflict diamonds are used to fund and fuel wars by rebel factions in: Angola, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of Congo. These illicit rough diamonds are mined by slave laborers, often children, and are then smuggled to neighboring countries where they enter the marketplace. (United Nations)

Did You Know...?

- Currently, 300,000 carats of diamonds are mined annually with slave labor in rebel held regions in Ivory Coast. (Diamonds for Africa)
- In the past 15 years, an estimated 50,000 people have been killed in Sierra Leone, 500,000 in Angola, and 4 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo. (Diamonds for Africa)
- Both the FBI and Washington Post found significant links between al-Qaeda money laundering efforts and the rough diamond trade in Sierra Leone. (Global Witness)
- Although the Democratic Republic of Congo produces more than \$2 billion of diamonds annually, 90% of its population of 60
(cont on following page)

Sources on Conflict Diamonds

1 משלי כט, כד

חולק עם גנב שונא נפשו אלה ישמע ולא יגיד

Proverbs 29:24

He who shares with a thief is his own enemy; He hears the blasphemy and does not tell.

2 רמב"ם הלכות גניבה פרק ה

א אסור לקנות מן הגנב החפץ שגנב, ועון גדול הוא: שהרי מחזיק ידי עוברי עבירה, וגורם לו לגנוב גניבות אחרות, שאם לא ימצא לוקח, אינו גונב; ועל זה נאמר "חולק עם גנב, שונא נפשו"

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Geneivah 5:1

It is forbidden to purchase anything that has been stolen from a thief, it is a great sin because it supports transgressors and encourages thieves to steal again. If a thief cannot find a buyer for his stolen goods he will not steal.

3 שולחן ערוך חושן משפט הלכות גניבה סימן שנו

אסור לקנות מהגנב החפץ שגנב, ועון גדול הוא, שהרי מחזיק ידי עוברי עבירה וגורם לו לגנוב גניבות אחרות; שאם לא ימצא לוקח, אינו גונב. וכן אסור לסייע לגנוב בשום דבר כדי שייגנוב

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It is forbidden to purchase stolen goods. And this is a great sin, since doing so contributes to criminal activity and enables further theft; if a thief would not find a market for his or her goods, he or she would not continue to steal. *Ramah: Additionally, it is forbidden to facilitate theft.*

Did You Know...?

million lives in dire poverty. The diamond capital, Mbjui Mayi, has no clean water, poor roads, and minimal electricity.

(Diamonds for Africa)

- Retail diamond sales totaled \$56 billion last year worldwide. Half of that was spent in the United States. (American RadioWorks)
- Only 18% of diamond retailers have policies ensuring their diamonds are compliant with the Kimberly Process, an international certification system that tracks diamonds. (Amnesty International and Global Witness)

אסור לקנות מגנב את הדבר שגנב ועון גדול הוא שהוא מחזיק ידי עוברי עבירה כדאמרי אינשי לאו עכברא גנב אלא חורא גנב וגורם להגנב שיגנוב עוד שאם לא היה מוצא מי שיקנם לא היה גונב ולדעת הטור אסור לקנות ממנו שום דבר כמ"ש בס"ט וכן איסור חמור הוא לסייע לגנב בשום דבר כדי שיגנוב ולכן אומן שמבקשים ממנו לעשות דבר והוא מבין שהדבר הזה הוא לעסק גנבה אסור לו לעשותם ואם עשה ענשו חמור מאד ואפילו אם הדבר ספק אצלו אם זהו לגנבה אסור לסייע

Aruch HaShulchan, Choshen Mishpat, Laws of Theft 35

It is forbidden to purchase stolen goods. And this is a great sin, since doing so contributes to criminal activity... if a thief would not find a market for his or her goods, he or she would not continue to steal. Likewise the Tur also claims that it is forbidden to purchase stolen goods and adds that this it is especially egregious to enable theft which will in turn facilitate more theft. Based on this train of thought, if an artisan is contracted, he or she must refuse the contract if it is known that the raw materials were stolen. If the artisan does work with stolen objects, he or she will be severely punished. All this applies even if one suspects that the raw materials were illegally procured.

5 Rav Soloveitchik, Halachik Man (pages 91, 94):

“The actualization of the ideals of justice and righteousness is the pillar of fire which *halakbic* man follows, when he, as a rabbi and teacher in Israel, services his community,”According to the outlook of *Halakbah*, the service of God (with the exception of the study of the Torah) can be carried out only through the implementation, the actualization of it’s principles in the real world. The ideal of righteousness is the guiding light of this world-view. *Halakbic* man’s most fervent desire is the perfection of the world under the dominion of righteousness and loving-kindness - the realization of the a priori, ideal creation, whose name is Torah (or *Halakbah*), in the realm of concrete life. The *Halakbah* is not hermetically enclosed within the confines of cult sanctuaries but penetrates into every nook and cranny of life. The marketplace, the street, the factory, the house, the meeting place, the banquet hall, all constitute the backdrop for the religious life.”

What You Can Do

As a couple begins their new life together, building a *bayit ne’eman beyisrael*, there is no better way to start a life of social justice than by ensuring their diamonds are conflict free.

- Social change begins with awareness. Therefore, educate yourself and others regarding this important issue and then use your consumer power to bring about change.
- When purchasing diamonds, ask to see a copy of the retailer’s policy regarding conflict diamonds and make sure their suppliers follow the Kimberly Process, which is a legal requirement, as well as the Voluntary System of Warranties, which helps fill in the gaps found in the Kimberly Process.

Through our demand to have conflict-free and ethical diamonds that support the people doing the actual work, we can move towards a more just world.

Let’s Sum Up The Sources...

The sources presented above discuss the buying and selling of stolen goods. One idea that animates these sources is the buyer’s culpability in sustaining corrupt systems. For instance, the *Tur*, cited above, explains that by purchasing stolen objects one enables others to steal by creating demand and markets for stolen goods. These sources exclude stolen goods from the marketplace and force us to confront our complicity in immoral global trades, like Conflict Diamonds, that originate in the oppressions of millions. The *Tur* demands that we completely separate ourselves from Conflict Diamonds.