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Fair Trade Shabbat Sermon

Secret Pain

A sermon by Rabbi Elliot Salo Schoenberg

A poor man came to visit Rav Joseph Baer the great grandfather of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik just before Passover. He had a question of Jewish law, "I cannot afford to buy wine, if I drink four cups of milk do I fulfill the obligation to drink the four cups of wine?" The rabbi quickly responded 'No' and gave him 25 rubles with which to buy wine. Surprised, the rabbi's wife inquired, "Wine for his Seder would at most cost 3 rubles, why did you give him so much, 25 rubles?" "This poor man had a secret he did not share with us. His secret pain was he did not have enough money to buy chicken and matzah, as well as wine." The wife asked, "And how do you know this?" The rabbi responded, "Because he would never mix meat with milk. I gave him money to buy the food he needed to make a proper Seder."

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik saw the secret pain of this poor man. (From *The Night that Unites: Passover Haggadah* edited by Aaron Goldheider). This week's Torah reading is Parshat Kedoshim which includes the famous verse, Leviticus 19:18 "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow man as yourself: I am the Lord." You all know Hillel's famous statement, "The rest is commentary, now go study the commentary." Rashi comments, "The Tanna Rabbi Akiba said, 'This is a great rule in the Torah.'" On this critical verse, let us see what is added by Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov (1745–1807). Reb Moshe was in a saloon where he overheard the conversation of two patrons who were drinking and overeating, and then each gave the other a big hug. "Do you really love me?" the other replied, "But of course." The first responded, "How can that be if you do not know my secret pain?" Reb Moshe then revealed the deeper meaning of our verse, "You cannot really love another if you do not know their secret pain."

This is a beautiful bar of chocolate. What do you see? What associations do you have with chocolate? Growing up for Cathy, my wife, if it wasn't chocolate, it wasn't dessert. She especially remembers her Aunt Lois' amazing chocolate cakes. When our boys were young, after they shoveled the snow from our driveway, their reward was hot chocolate with whipped cream. I knew I was welcomed into Cathy's family when I came for my first visit and received a gift-wrapped package of Frango Chocolate Mints from Marshall Fields. For all of Cathy's family get togethers, whoever was hosting would buy Cora Lee handmade Chocolates. One year a cousin pushed in the bottoms on every chocolate to make sure she got the filling she wanted.

Now let me tell you about **the secret pain that you do not see inside this bar of chocolate**, your favorite hot chocolate, or that handmade bonbon. The cocoa industry has over a hundred year history of being investigated for child labor/slavery violations. In 1905 an investigative report appeared in Harper's Bazaar documenting the use of slavery on the Portuguese island of Sao Tome. It took years before Cadbury (originally founded by Quakers), which contributed funds to anti-slavery programs at home in England, ceased using slaves on the island. One hundred years later the slavery continues. Almost half of the world's cocoa is sourced from the Ivory Coast. There are 48,000 small farms.

Many of the laborers are children tricked into coming to earn money for their families. Other children are kidnapped in nearby Mali and Burkina Faso and trafficked over the border on motorbikes. The children, ages 10-16, work 10-12 hours a day; they are rarely paid and certainly do not go to school. They are beaten so they are afraid to escape, and perform dangerous tasks like cutting the cocoa pods down with larger machetes. Companies like Nestle's and Hershey's do not deny that they buy from bulk resellers not directly from the farmers, so there is little they can do. They also point out that the Ivory Coast has laws against child labor, and they are not responsible for enforcing that nation's laws. My friends, there is a secret pain every time we bite into a bar of chocolate, sip hot chocolate or eat a Hershey's Kiss. What we are enjoying is the product of child slaves.

What can we do? Let me suggest three things to make visible the secret pain of chocolate.

- Get informed. Be educated. I recommend the 56 minute documentary **The Dark Side of Chocolate**. Learn about the international movement of Fair Trade.
- Buy ethically sourced chocolate, including **Fair Trade certified brands**.
- Make your synagogue into a Fair Trade synagogue. Join the campaign. Every Shabbat, on our bimah, our rabbi hands each child a small piece of chocolate to teach that the Torah is sweet. He hand delivers sweet and ethically sourced Fair Trade chocolate bits. Let us return to the famous verse, Leviticus 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord."

R' Naftali Zvi Horowitz, the Ropshitzer Rebbe (1760-1827), was a Hasidic Rebbe to thousands; he was known for teaching that one must always be ready to pray. When he was in heder learning at an early age his teacher taught him that when the Hebrew letter yod appears twice in a text side-by-side those two letters spell the name of God. One day the young Naftali came to his teacher with what he thought was the name of God. He was mistaken. He showed him the Hebrew vowel sheva. Two dots one on top of the other, not side-by-side. "See here is the name of God." The teacher responded, "No, my son. The name of God is when two yods are side-by-side, but here this one on top of the other, this is a sheva, the sound of nothing." Rabbi Naftali would later teach the simple meaning of this verse, 'Love your fellow as yourself' means when two people stand by his side, in one row, then, Ani Adonai, God is present."

My dear friends, it is time to stand side-by-side by the child laborers of West Africa. My dear friends it is time to see the secret pain of others, then God is truly present in our lives. Amen

Rabbi Elliot Salo Schoenberg is the Associate Executive Director and International Director of Placement at the Rabbinical Assembly. This is a copy of the sermon he gave on Fair Trade Shabbat 2016. It is reprinted here by Fair Trade Campaigns with his permission.