



S H M A . C O M

Rabbi Ari Weiss is the founding director of Uri L'Tzedek, an Orthodox social justice organization guided by Torah values and dedicated to combating suffering and oppression ([utzedeck.org](http://utzedeck.org)). Previously, Weiss was co-director of the Meorot University Fellowship at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School in Riverdale, N.Y., where he received *smikha* in 2007.

Jonathan Rosenthal has been working to make global trade more just for more than 25 years. He is a principal with Just Works Consulting, creating and managing projects that help strengthen the social justice commitments of mission-driven trade organizations. He co-founded Equal Exchange and Oke USA.

Ilana Schatz is the founding executive director of Fair Trade Judaica, a nonprofit working to build the fair trade movement in the Jewish community ([www.fairtradejudaica.org](http://www.fairtradejudaica.org)). She also serves as a lay spiritual leader at Kehilla Community Synagogue in Oakland, Calif.

Maggid Jonah Meadows Adels is a farmer and filmmaker in the Hudson River Valley, where he serves as lead educator for the Jewish Farm School. He is co-founder of Jews Against Hydrofracking and is on the crew of the veggie oil-powered Teva Topsy Turvy Bus, which runs alternative-energy and sustainable-design workshops in Jewish communities across the United States.

Yosef Goldman, a musician, prayer leader, activist, educator and lifelong New Yorker, is a fourth-year rabbinical and cantorial student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

## Dig Deeper

SKYPE interviews with commentator and respondents on [www.shma.com](http://www.shma.com)

The notion that we are all connected becomes clearer each day as we receive news, food, and products from around the planet. While globalization has made the world a smaller place, it has also overwhelmed many of us; we struggle to see how we can live ethical lives and repair the world in the face of mega-corporations, governments, wars, and disasters.

By creating a context for acting ethically in a centuries-old tradition, Rabbi Ari Weiss gives us the opportunity to engage something bigger than ourselves as we accept the obligation to ban the abhorrent from our homes. The text's instructions on living a moral life can energize rather than paralyze us as we open to the liberation that comes from becoming more awake. We can choose fair trade and organic products, and support local businesses and farms that enrich rather than deplete our communities. Affirming our interconnectedness, we create pathways — individually and collectively — to not only abhor unfairness but embrace justice as a guiding light.

—Jonathan Rosenthal

Rabbi Ari Weiss asks the question that faces each of us every time we open our wallets: What are the consequences, both for me and the larger world, of what I buy today? Each purchase says something about us and our relationship with God. For example, can we truly fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the Hanukkah candles if the menorah we use is produced by child labor? Does the “abhorrence” of the product also contaminate the holy action itself? When we become cut off from our own values and intentions, we lose our connection with the divine.

There are positive answers to the “uneasy questions about our consumption habits.” We are blessed to live in a time when there are organizations dedicated to help us make informed choices, including Fair Trade, Not for Sale, SweatFree Communities, Green America, No Sweat, and Union Label. Let us ban unholy purchases and work toward consumption habits that bring more justice, holiness, and connection into the world.

—Ilana Schatz

New forms of energy are in the works, with promises to revive floundering economies and reduce our dependence on foreign oil: tar sands in Canada; shale gas in the United States, and shale oil in Israel. Independence and unity are certainly to be valued, but at

what cost? Poisoned air and water, mass extinction of vulnerable species, and climate chaos are dreadful effects of these new forms of energy. According to the analysis of Rabbi Ari Weiss, their single minded pursuit is akin to idol worship.

In Rebbe Nachman's tale, “The King's Son and the

Son of the Maid,” a young prince is gifted a musical instrument that magically plays the song of unity. Emerging from the forest to find a city, the prince's task is to restore the kingdom to wisdom by solving a series of riddles in an enchanted garden. But it turns out that the song of unity on its own is not enough to save the kingdom: The prince is only able to succeed by practicing the wisdom of the ancestors, the ability to *comprehend one thing from another*.

It seems that we have lost the ability to distinguish between the abhorrent and the holy. We must cherish unity, but also practice discernment, challenging the idols of greed and ignorance that threaten our livelihood and God's creation.

—Jonah Meadows Adels

Rabbi Ari Weiss charges us to look critically at our consumption habits and consider the source of products before we bring them into the sacred space of the Jewish home. The scrutiny allows for a broader conversation — long overdue in our communities — about the sources of money that sustain our sacred places and institutions.

Toward the end of Deuteronomy (23:19), the Torah explicitly forbids gifts to the Temple, Mikdash, that come from objection-

able sources, calling such gifts “abhorrent to the Lord your God.” Applying this law to the *mikdash me'at* (miniature sanctuary) of our houses of worship and study, the Jewish community is confronted with difficult questions about how we fund our institutions and what criteria we place on the gifts we accept.

Sacred space cannot be built on a foundation of funds attained by methods that are not consonant with what we know to be right and holy. We cannot sustain our synagogues and schools — our prayer lives and Torah study — with money made by exploiting workers, objectifying women, polluting the environment, or by any other morally questionable means, and continue to call those spaces holy. What steps can we take to ensure that the abhorrent does not enter our spiritual homes? Is our community ready to take such steps?

—Yosef Goldman

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**“And you shall bring no abhorrent thing into your house or you will be under the ban like it. You shall surely despise it and shall surely abhor it, for it is under the ban.”**

—Deuteronomy 7:26

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Simply read, this verse bans the abhorrent from the Jewish home. In doing so, it asks us to define the abhorrent: that which is so despised that it has no place in Jewish life and *must be put under ban*. The rabbis of the Talmud have traditionally identified the abhorrent with idol worship. In their reading, anything contaminated through the worship of a foreign God cannot be consumed by Jews.

In the 13th century, this view is radicalized by the anonymous author of the *Sefer ha-Chinuch*. Building on the traditional view, we learn that any object “that was gained through theft, violence, or exploitation, or from any disgusting element” is considered abhorrent. Moreover, an individual's “heart is inclined toward evil, which desires [an item] and brings it into the home; this inclination toward evil is called idol worship.” Idol worship is not what we initially thought: It can be anything. For example, a consumer good produced through exploitation would be identified as “abhorrent” and banned.

In this era of globalization, in which 30 million people live as slaves and millions more work in sweatshops around the world, our sage's teaching forces us, as consumers, to ask uneasy questions about our consumption habits. Knowing what we know, can we continue to purchase goods, globally produced, without the fear that we are bringing the abhorrent into our homes?

—Ari Weiss