

Tin, Torah and Technology: A Passover Call to Freedom
Shabbat HaGadol – Parshat Tzav
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Associate Rabbi Susan Leider

When I think back to my days in middle school and high school, I struggle to remember what it was like to write term papers without a computer. The process of outlining and editing my thoughts on paper almost seems impossible now without the aid of a computer. When I attempt to hand-write prose, my fingers refuse to work as quickly as my brain is churning out the concepts. I end up with writers' cramp, illegible handwriting and words that do not flow on the page as effectively as the words that spill out from my fingertips as they fly over the keyboard.

This is one simple example of how dependent I am on technology for doing my day-to-day work. Whether it is a Blackberry, a laptop, or an I-Pad, we enjoy the freedom of technology in a way that enriches our lives in ways that our ancestors could have never imagined. The freedom that technology grants us encourages us to expand our own individual expression.

As we prepare for our *Hag Herut*, the Festival of Freedom, we are enjoined to consider freedom in a broader sense. From our family community, to the Jewish community, to our local community and beyond, we are commanded to think about how our individual freedom intersects with the world. Such an opportunity came my way this past month, as I learned about how my technological freedom might just be enslaving someone else. It is often easy to ignore conflicts that are happening half-way around the world. But when the freedom I enjoy, is integrally linked to the enslavement of a nation, then I as a Jew, I have an obligation to sit up, pay attention and do something.

There is a massive and volatile Conflict in Eastern Congo and this conflict is fueled by the demand for valuable minerals that are in every one of our electronics; cell phones, cameras, and laptops. What are these valuable minerals and how are they used?

- **Tin:** 53% of tin worldwide is used as a solder, the vast majority of which goes into electronics. Armed groups earn approximately \$85 million per year from trading in tin. Congo is the 6th largest producer in the world.
- **Tantalum:** Also known as coltan, this mineral is used to store electricity in capacitors in iPods, digital cameras, and cell phones. 65-80% of the world's

tantalum is used in electronic products. Armed groups earn an estimated \$8 million per year from trading in tantalum. 15% -20% of the world's supply comes from Congo.

- **Tungsten:** Used to make your cell phone or Blackberry vibrate, Tungsten is a growing source of income for armed groups in Congo, with armed groups currently earning approximately \$2 million annually.

In the words of New York Times Journalist Lydia Polgreen, these minerals are “consumed by a world oblivious to its origins.” What are their origins?

The bulk of the trade in these minerals is controlled by the FDLR – a rebel group also known as The Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda. By illegally extracting minerals, using Congolese slave labor, they are empowered to commit atrocities; sexual violence and murder. Setting fire to entire villages, raping children and slavery are commonplace ways for them to control this empire and to ensure their control. Since 1998, 5.4 million civilians were killed 200,000 rapes committed and 1.5 million people have been displaced.

This is where Torah comes in: We must on this *Shabbat HaGadol* renew our efforts to fight slavery in the world. This is true in any case, but is even painfully more evident when it is linked to the luxuries we enjoy as American citizens.

There is a plan. There is a strategy and a way for us to realize our hopes for change in concrete action. Jewish World Watch, whose motto derives from a verse in the book of Leviticus, “Do not stand by the blood of your neighbor,” has a plan and we can participate.

One of the most important ways that we can do this is to exert positive pressure on the market place. Electronics companies can demand transparency from their suppliers and trace the minerals they use to ensure they do not originate from mines that are financing armed groups and criminal interests. Consumers and global citizens have a critical role to play in demanding that companies and governments exercise leverage over the supply chain to end the trade in Congo's conflict minerals. There are four concrete steps that you can take to help address this issue:

- **Tell Your Senator/Representative – No More Conflict Minerals!** – There are two bills we need to know about: a bill introduced by U.S. Senators Brownback (R-KS), Durbin (D-IL), and Feingold (D-WI), the "Congo Conflict Minerals Act of 2009" (S. 891) and “The

Conflict Minerals Trade Act of 2009 (HR 4128), introduced to the House of Representatives by Rep. James McDermott. While Senators Boxer and Feinstein have co-sponsored the first bill, the second bill is supported by Representative Henry Waxman and needs additional support. Please contact your representative to express support for these bills.

- **Urge Electronic Companies to Stop Conflict Minerals – Sign the Pledge!** Electronics companies will be motivated to support these efforts when we show them that there is a large market of US consumers that want their products to be conflict free. Jewish World Watch has worked in coalition with other like-minded groups to create a conflict minerals pledge that commits electronics companies to ensure their products are conflict-free. Sign the pledge to let electronics companies know that there is a large grassroots constituency who believe in conflict-free products!
- **Send an email to the 21 largest electronics companies** Urge them to sign the Conflict Minerals Pledge and develop conflict-free products.
- **Participate in the walk** – On April 18, join the walk to end genocide.

These are simple measure that we can take with the help of Jewish World Watch (www.jewishworldwatch.org). We have an obligation to be sure that our benefiting from technology is not resulting in the enslavement of others. When you sit down to your *seder* this year, know that you have done everything you possibly can to make sure that your freedom is linked to the freedom of those who live in Congo. *Shabbat Shalom* and *Hag Kasher v'Sameakh*.