



Jewish Values and Fair Trade

**As Jews
we are
obligated
to work for
economic
justice**

"There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty - the most terrible of sufferings. Our teachers have said: if all the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other, poverty would outweigh them all." (Midrash Exodus Rabbah 31:12)

The primary Jewish tool for helping the poor is tzedakah. According to the great Jewish scholar Rabbi Moses ben Maimonides, the highest form of tzedakah is entering into a business partnership or giving a person a job so that he or she can become self-sufficient. When we buy fair trade products, we are effectively entering into a business partnership with the producer. If we fail to take into account their economic well-being, if we focus only on getting the best deal, then we're doing the opposite of what tzedakah obligates us to do. Our partnership with fair trade producers helps lift them out of poverty, not drive them further into poverty.

**As Jews
we are
obligated
to insure that
workers are
treated justly.**

"You shall not abuse a needy laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and he risks his life for it." (Deut. 24:14-15)

"In disputes between employees and workers, the rights of the worker were given preference over those of the employer." (Talmud, Baba Metzia 77a).

Poor laborers depend on earning a decent wage in order to obtain the simple necessities of life. If an artisan or farmer works hard to produce a product that we want and need, we have an obligation to ensure that the farmer and his or her family receive sufficient income to live a sustainable life.

**As Jews
we are
obligated
to be
responsible
consumers**

"If you sell anything to your neighbor or buy anything from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another." (Leviticus 25:14)

"It is forbidden to cheat people in buying and selling, or to deceive them."

(Rabbi Moses ben Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mechirah 18:1)

Jewish law makes it very clear that workers under our care are to be treated justly. From this it can be inferred that as consumers, we also have the obligation to ensure that the people who are producing the goods that we purchase are paid properly and fairly for their work.

