

Secrets Of A Diamond Maven

Who doesn't know what a diamond is?! Well, it turns out, most of us....

Few people truly know diamonds and their mysterious and fascinating world. One of those people is Isaac Wolf, diamond merchant extraordinaire, who just purchased one of the world's most expensive diamonds. Join *Zman* as we interview Wolf—also a *baal tzedakah* extraordinaire—to learn his trade secrets, as well as hear fascinating stories about the world's most famous diamonds.



The Makings of a Diamond Maven

Cheshvan 5726—November, 1965.

Seventeen-year-old Isaac Wolf followed his father into the tumultuous polishing hall with tentative steps. He had just completed four years of study in the Sanz-Klausenburg yeshiva in *Eretz Yisrael* and had become a *chosson*. A few days later, his father turned to him and asked: “Isaac, you’re getting married and building a home. You’ll have to make a living.”

“I know.”

“How will you make a living?”

“I don’t know.”

“Would you like to learn how to polish diamonds?”

“Maybe.”

Given such an enthusiastic response, his father stated assertively, “Follow me.”

He then introduced Isaac to a longtime friend. The friend picked up a diamond and placed it in Isaac’s hand. At that moment, the young man felt something click; something inside his heart immediately connected with the sparkling stone. His father and his father’s friend looked at him. Isaac’s excited eyes gave it away.

He accepted a place at the edge of a bench of polishers and watched how they worked. After a brief but detailed tutorial, he was given a two carat diamond (which is relatively large) and got to work!

He sat down before a flat wheel with a rotating speed of about 3,000-3,500 revolutions per minute. The wheel was coated with diamond powder. His hand held a large and bulky device called a “dop,” which was designed to hold the stone. He was instructed to dip the diamond into wet asbestos and insert it into a circular groove at the edge of the dop. He then had to lay the diamond on the rapidly rotating wheel and apply pressure so that the diamond face was smoothed out. During the process, the asbestos heated up and congealed into glue, which

caused the diamond to stick to the groove into which it was placed. Isaac was warned that when he finished smoothing and aligning the diamond’s face, he should not lift the dop too quickly, because the diamond could fly off the speeding wheel.

With complete confidence and peace of mind, Isaac carried out the job. He dipped the diamond in asbestos, put it into the dop groove, applied pressure and lifted the tool....

Showing no pity for the young, inexperienced worker, the diamond shot out from the groove like a bullet! It disappeared somewhere in the great hall!

Slight snickers were heard. Then one of the workers called out sarcastically, “Give the kid the diamond magnet,” followed by more giggling.

Isaac had never heard of a “diamond magnet” and his gaze wandered in search of the wonder. When he noticed the bemused but friendly and encouraging looks, he smiled back, realizing that there was no such thing as a diamond magnet....

Understanding that it was now up to him to find the lost diamond, he grabbed a lamp with a long power cord and headed toward the most remote corner of the hall. He bent down and plugged the lamp into the socket. That’s when it happened—boom! The hall



Isaac during his engagement and shortly before beginning work as a 17-year-old diamond polisher.

was suddenly plunged into darkness. He had blown a fuse!

What else could go wrong on my first day? he thought to himself.

He felt his way to the door of the hall, hoping to open it and get a little light from outside. He did so only to discover, to his surprise, that the entire polishing hall was black. In fact, the entire building was black. He had blown the power in the entire building....

Or so he thought.

Upon further investigation, he discovered that the entire city had lost power. It would become known as the famous New York City blackout of 1965. It just happened to occur at the exact moment Isaac tried to plug in the lamp.

The reason for the blackout was a power outage on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. It caused an automatic and sudden power failure in upstate New York, which for the first time in history closed down the entire system. The power failure covered almost 50,000 square miles, and affected about 25 million people.

New York City suffered the most. More than 800,000 people on their way to work were stuck in the subway. Traffic jams blocked roads. Airports closed down; at least 200 aircraft were directed to other routes. The legendary lights of Broadway went dark. Countless suburban commuters despaired of getting home. Thousands of people were stuck in elevators.

The shining light in the massive outage was the altruism displayed by the common citizen. People volunteered to direct traffic, and handed out candles; they spent the night sleeping in Grand Central Station without fear of someone stealing their wallets.

It was obviously impossible to work in the dark, to say nothing of trying to find a lost tiny stone, so Isaac made his way home partly on foot and partly by getting rides from kindhearted people. When the power returned he would have to go back and find the stone. If not, he would have to pay the full value to its owner.



Isaac Wolf in his office, as a young, successful diamond merchant.



The dop. The diamond is placed on a rapidly rotating wheel, and strong pressure is applied to the face of the diamond to give it a flat surface.



Wolf, his friend Moshe Reich, and an accountant, prior to renovating and opening a polishing workshop on the 24th floor of a Tel Aviv tower.

A day later, with the lights back on, he returned to the office. It was late afternoon and the building was empty. He plugged in the lamp—this time without incident—and searched for the diamond... under each bench... over every table... and in every nook and cranny where it might be. But no stone. He again went home empty-handed and empty-hearted. Where would he get the huge sum of money to pay for the diamond?