The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן תרנ"ו סעיף א'

Halacha Highlight

Spending more than one-fifth to fulfill a *mitzvah*

Rema Siman 656 Seif 1 (b)
אין צריך לבזבז עליה הון רב

One is not obligated to spend a large sum of money

Rema rules that one who does not have an *esrog* or other *mitzvah* object to fulfill a passing *mitzvah* is not required to spend a fortune in order to acquire that *mitzvah* object. He explains that this is based on the Gemara's statement that one who will spend his money, is not required to spend more than one-fifth, even to fulfill a passing *mitzvah*. Mishnah Berurah (סק"ז) explains that it is evident from the Gemara that one-third of one's money one is not required to spend in order to acquire a *mitzvah* object. Moreover, *Poskim* write that one is not even required to spend less than one-third of his money to purchase a *mitzvah* object. The guiding principle to follow is Chazal's statement that when giving *tzedaka* one should not give away more than one-fifth out of concern that he will become impoverished and reliant on other people's support and the same guideline should be followed for purchasing *mitzvah* objects. In his *sefer* Ahavas Chessed, the Chofetz Chaim writes (ח"ב פי"ט אות א') that one who is extremely wealthy so that even if he gives away one-fifth of his money it is unlikely that he will become reliant upon others may give away more than one-fifth of his money and Rav Moshe Feinstein (אג"מ או"ח ח"ה סי' מ"ג סק"י) adopts a similar position and seemingly this would apply to purchasing *mitzvah* objects as well.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (אג"מ יו"ד ח"א סי' קמ"ה ד"ה והנה) wonders about the rationale that exempts one from having to spend a large percentage of his money to fulfill a *mitzvah*. One possible explanation is that spending such a large amount of money makes him an אונס who is thereby exempt from the *mitzvah*. Another possible explanation is that the Torah did not command a person to fulfill a *mitzvah* if doing so will involve spending more than one-fifth of one's money. He identifies a number of practical differences between these two explanations and leaves the matter unresolved.

Overview

Siman 656 Seif 1 (b):

Someone who does not have an *esrog* or other *mitzvah* object used for a passing *mitzvah* is not required to spend a fortune to obtain that *mitzvah* object as Chazal state: One who is spending is not required to spend more than one-fifth even for a passing *mitzvah*. This is limited to fulfilling positive *mitzvos* but one must be willing to spend all of his money to avoid transgressing a prohibition (See below the end of *siman* 658 in the Rema).

- It is evident from the Gemara that one is not required to spend a third of his money for a single *mitzvah* and the *Poskim* agree that one is not even required to spend less than one-third. They use the *mitzvah* of *tzedaka* as precedent that one need not spend more than one-fifth so that he should not become impoverished and become reliant on others. (M.B. 7)
- One is required to spend a tenth of his money since even regarding *tzedaka* 1/10 is concerned an average amount to give. In Biur Halacha we explain that one may not spend less than one-tenth and it may be that for a passing *mitzvah* one should spend one-fifth. (M.B. 8)
- Magen Avrohom writes that the Gemara in Gittin (56) implies that it is permitted to violate a prohibition out of fear of the government but later authorities question this since in that case it was a matter of life and death. (M.B. 9)
- Even if one will have to beg door to door one may not violate a Biblical prohibition. (M.B. 10)