

Buying Jewish: Supermarket Chains Vs. Mom-and-Pop Stores

Rav Eliezer Cohen

Question: We previously spoke about the importance of patronizing Jewish businesses. Does the same mitzvah apply to large Jewish-owned supermarket chain stores? Should one give them priority over non-Jewish chain stores?

Answer: Generally speaking, shopping in a large chain store owned by a Jew would also fall under the mitzvah of supporting a Jew and is the proper thing to do.

In Sefer Teshuvos Vehanhagos, Rav Moshe Sternbuch *shlita* offers an interesting justification for those who are not strict to only buy from Jewish stores. He suggests that it could be that one only is obligated to buy from a Jewish store if the owner needs this business to earn his livelihood. If he has enough money to live and one would only be providing him with extra money by shopping in his store, it could be argued that there is no strict obligation to shop there. In this case, Rav Sternbuch suggests that he may be permitted to purchase from a non-Jewish store for even a slightly cheaper price, thereby saving himself money, rather than giving the store owner extra money.

Rav Sternbuch says that he did not find this *chiddush* in any sefer and is merely offering it as a justification for those who do not frequent Jewish stores.

Rav Yaakov Blau *zt"l*, in his *Sefer Tzedaka U'Mishpat* on the laws of *tzedakah*, discusses a case where someone in the market to buy a Sefer Torah has two options – he can either buy a Torah from a large *safrus* company or from an indigent private *sofer*. The private *sofer* needs the money badly, but he cannot match the price of the large business and will have to charge more for his Torah. Rav Blau rules that if the buyer would purchase the Torah from the poor man, he may use *ma'aser* money to cover the difference in cost.

I would suggest that the same ruling would apply when it comes to purchasing from stores. While one is not required to shop in a Jewish store if the prices are significantly higher than a non-Jewish store, if one does patronize the Jewish store, he may use *ma'aser* money to cover the difference in price. It could be argued that this would only apply to a local store, where the owner needs the money to live; however, a large chain store may be different and it is not clear that one could use *maaser* money to shop there.

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