

Competition in Talmud Torah

HaRav Chaim Weg

Question: A rebbi has a side business of learning Mishnayos with boys who want to make a *siyum* at their bar mitzvah. He is very successful with the boys in his neighborhood and wants to expand to other neighborhoods as well; however, there are other rabbeim doing the same thing in those neighborhoods and he may be hurting their business by encroaching on their territory. Is he permitted to do so?

Answer: Generally speaking, a local business is allowed to compete with a different local business, provided he isn't putting him out of business completely, whereas a non-local is not allowed to compete with local businesses if he is harming them in any way.

The teaching of Torah, however, is a clear exception to the rule. The Gemara clearly says that when it comes to teaching Torah, competition is always permitted due to the dictum of "*kinas sofrim tarbeh chochmah*", competition increases the quality of everyone's learning. Hence, anyone is allowed to offer a service related to teaching Torah, even if he lives outside the city and even if he will be putting existing Torah teachers in the city out of business.

In his Sefer Emunah U'Bitachon, the Chazon Ish speaks at length on this topic and stresses that one must know the halacha before taking action against a competing business one views as a threat. To illustrate, he notes that if someone from out-of-town would open a store to compete with locals and harm their business, he would be in the wrong and it would be permitted to do whatever possible to shut him down. Yet, if someone from out-of-town would open a new school to teach Torah and the locals would shut him down, they would be the ones acting inappropriately.