

Q&A from the Bais HaVaad Halacha Hotline

Gadol Talmud

February 9, 2023

Q A while back I pledged a set of Shas from a certain publisher to my shul, but the prices have almost doubled since. What do I owe now?



A After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I, the new Austrian currency, the krone, underwent severe inflation, spawning queries like yours for the Jews of Galicia.

R' Meir Arik (Shu"t Imrei Yosher 2:98) was asked about someone who underwrote the wedding expenses of an orphan before the currency lost most of its value. He ruled that since the man hadn't pledged a specific number of kronen, he must pay for the wedding despite the drastic price increase.

R' Yaakov Blau (Tzedakah Umishpat *perek* 4 note 101) clarifies that if the pledge was paid up before the inflation but the wedding needs were only purchased afterward at much higher cost, the obligation is satisfied. In the opposite case—where the wedding was held immediately with borrowed funds and the donor didn't pay before the currency was inflated—he must pay according to the current rate, and the orphan pockets the difference. In your case as well, you must donate according to the current price of the Shas. If you had paid the shul but it hadn't yet purchased the sfarim before the price rise, the loss would be the shul's. If the shul bought the Shas with other funds and you postponed payment, you must pay the higher price. The Maharsham (3:302) seems to disagree with the Imrei Yosher, as he ruled leniently in a case where someone pledged a container of flour to support the poor and the price of flour doubled before he paid. He explained that such a pledge can be fulfilled by paying the cash value of the flour, so the pledge is treated as if it had been made for cash, and the obligation is satisfied at the original price.

The Tzedakah Umishpat (*ibid.*) reconciles the two *teshuvos* by distinguishing between pledging a specific item, like flour, and pledging an item of indeterminate cost, like to relieve an orphan's wedding expense

burden. Based on this, your pledge can be fulfilled by paying the original price, because it was for a specific item.

The Maharsham notes that if the pledge was in exchange for a *kibud* (honor), it would be treated as a barter, where the specific item is due regardless of its price change.

To avoid this issue, pledge a sum of money rather than a specific item.