

Supporting an Upper-Class Lifestyle

Rav Dovid Grossman, Rosh Bais HaVaad

Question: A wealthy man lost all his money overnight. He is now penniless but is still used to a very high standard of living. Is there an obligation to support him in a way that maintains his luxurious lifestyle?

Answer: The Gemara says that when a poor person is given *tzedakah*, he must be provided with "*dei machsoro asher yechsar lo*" which means that he should be supported according to what is missing from the standard of life to which he is accustomed. To this end, the Gemara relates stories of formerly rich people who were given servants to run in front of them and nice horses to ride on from *tzedakah* money.

The Poskim issue a few caveats to this halacha.

- They rule that this only applies if the person is still maintaining his upper-class lifestyle and the public still believes him to be rich. In such a case, downgrading his lifestyle would be a great cause of shame for him, as it would let everyone know that he has lost his wealth.
- Furthermore, the Poskim say that if the person was never truly rich, and was actually living above his means, there is no obligation to help him maintain the lifestyle he was living.

Another case the Gemara talks about is when someone still has assets, but is unable to unload them right now without suffering a significant loss. In such a case, they rule that he does not have to sell his assets at a loss, and he may accept *tzedakah* money to tide him over. For example, if someone owns certain merchandise that has a low market value at present, but he knows the price will rise substantially in a few months, he is permitted to hold onto the merchandise until the price goes up and may live off of *tzedakah* money until that time.