

Rav Dovid Grossman, Rosh Bais HaVaad

Question: People today often receive text message and email solicitations for *tzedakah*. Is there an obligation to give a donation to each one?

Answer: There is a Torah prohibition to refuse to give a donation to a poor person who asks you for money, as well as a positive commandment to give him something.

This prohibition has a few caveats. First of all, it only applies to a poor person who is raising money for his own needs. If someone is collecting money for a yeshiva, shul, mikveh, etc., one does not transgress this prohibition if he does not donate. Even if someone is collecting as a representative of an organization that helps poor people, there would be no prohibition to ignore him as long as the poor man himself is not personally asking you for a donation.

The Poskim discuss if a person has to respond to every solicitation from a poor person that he receives in the mail. I believe that the determining factor would be if the poor person is personally asking you for a donation or not. If he sent out a mass mailing, text or email to hundreds of people, and you just happen to be on his list, it cannot be considered a personal request for help; therefore, there would be no prohibition to not respond. On the other hand, if he sends you a personal letter, text, or email asking for your help, this certainly would be considered a personal request, and one would be prohibited to ignore it.