

Tzedakah Collectors During Davening

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Question: Many poor people solicit funds in shuls during davening. Does one have to interrupt his davening to give donations to each collector?

Answer: When a poor person asks for a donation, there is a prohibition to ignore him.

That being said, the Gemara in Bava Metziah talks about a person who finds a lost object and is approached by a poor man for a donation while he is busy tending to the object. The Gemara says that he does not have to give the man a donation because of the rule of "*osek b'mitzvah patur min hamitzvah*." (One who is busy with one mitzvah is exempt from doing another mitzvah.)

When someone is davening, there are times when it is forbidden for him to interrupt his prayers, such as when he is in the middle of *Kriyas Shema* or *Shemoneh Esrei*. It is definitely not advisable for collectors to make their rounds at these times and one certainly should not interrupt his prayers to give a donation.

There are times when it is permitted to interrupt one's *tefillos* to tend to a mitzvah matter, such as during *Pesukei Dezimrah*. Even during those times, however, one would still have the exemption of *osek b'mitzvah patur min hamitzvah* and he would not be obligated to give a donation.

A practical suggestion may be for a person to set up a few quarters or dollars next to his davening spot and to post a note that collectors may take one coin or bill. This way, his davening will not be interrupted and he will be able to fulfill the mitzvah.

There is a rule that when one decides in his mind to give tzedakah, his decision has the status of a *neder* and he must fulfill his promise. It often happens that someone who is davening will see a collector and decide that he wants to give him a dollar, but by the time he gets it out of his pocket, the man is gone. This could present a serious problem of not fulfilling one's *neder*. For this reason, one should be careful not to commit in his mind to giving the donation so that it does not constitute a *neder*.

When one is learning Torah, he also has the exemption of *osek b'mitzvah patur min hamitzvah* and he is not obligated to give a donation to a collector unless he is raising money for a pressing need that must be addressed specifically at that moment.